Continuity and Change in Contemporary Cheriyal Paintings from Telangana, India

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Abstract

Cheriyal painting is a living tradition of painting from the Telangana region in southern India. The oldest function of these paintings is to be a visual aid for the storytelling of local caste Puranas (stories). Earlier research has discussed the storytelling function of these scrolls (Thangavelu PhD 1998) and their historical antecedents in Deccani scroll painting (Mittal 2014). My research presents material on the continuity of the contemporary Cheriyal painting tradition as a complement to these approaches.

In the early 1980s the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) developed an interest in Cheriyal paintings as part of their initiatives for the sustainability of Indian handicrafts. The Board's intervention increased the paintings' visibility and influenced their means of production, presentation and reception. Since then, not only local communities commission performances, but museums, the handicrafts market, and private collectors commission paintings too. This shift in patronage had an impact on the paintings' function, materiality and iconography. The research explores these changes in the Cheriyal painting tradition, and the pictorial response to social transformations that took place since the intervention of the AIHB.

In the first chapters, I bring together Cheriyal temple and scroll paintings as the material culture of particular communities in Telangana, attached to the organic functions of these communities. Following this, I explore the institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting and their transformation into handicraft and cultural exhibits. In the final chapter, I introduce innovative Cheriyal painting commissions and question the extent of the tradition. In this thesis, I argue that under the one name 'Cheriyal' there are several types of paintings, many painters and multiple audiences. In presenting a variety of original material, I apprehend Cheriyal paintings' dynamic response to social changes in contemporary India, and consider this dynamism as a means to ensure its continuity over time.

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Table of Contents

List of illustrations

Chapter II- Historical and artistic context

Chapter III- Paintings in Cheriyal

Glossary of Terms

adugukunetollu: translated from Telugu as 'asker caste'. *Adugukunetollu* is the generic word in Telugu to define the dependent castes in Telangana that 'ask' alms to their patrons by performing their genealogical narratives.

Annanmar Kathai: oral epic from the Kongunadu region of Tamil Nadu in South India. The epic involves three main characters, two brothers and their younger sister. It is known in English as the Elder Brothers'story.

bhava: in the Indian performing art traditions, *bhava* constitutes the codified expression of certain emotion (*rasa*) as described in the *Shastras*, Sanskrit treatises for classical Indian arts.

bhomiya: generic term for deified cattle heroes in Western India (Rajasthan and Gujarat).

bhopa / bhopi: male and female storytellers of the Nayak caste who wander narrating the Epic of Pabuji along with a large cloth painting known as *phad* or *par*.

Bonalu: Hindu festival in the honour of Goddess Mahakali. The festival is celebrated in Telangana yearly in the month of July / August. It involves the offering of a *bonam* (from Sanskrit *bhojanam* for feast), a rice preparation presented in a freshly made pot, for the worship of goddesses in their regional forms as *Mysamma*, *Pochamma*, *Yellamma*, *Peddhamma*, *Dokkalamma*, *Ankalamma*, *Poleramma*, *Maremma*, and *Nookalamma*.

Braj: region around Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, India. This area is considered to be the land of Krishna. *Braj* also corresponds to the language spoken in the region.

Chakkali*:* washerman caste of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, known in other parts of India as Dhobi.

chitrakatha and *Chitrakathi*: from *chitra* (picture) and *katha* (story), the *chitrakatha* are visual narratives on paper, boards, cloth, scroll etc. The *Chitrakathi* are storytellers that use images in their performances of these narratives. *Chitrakathi* most commonly designate performers in Maharashtra who use paintings on paper boards known as Paithan painting in their storytelling.

Dalit: from Sanskrit for 'oppressed.' Dalit has come to be more commonly used instead of 'Untouchables' after being popularised in the twentieth century by B. R. Ambedkar. The word carries political connotations and a sense of self-respect and assertion.

darshan: key moment of Hindu worship where the devotee and the deity as a *murti* exchange gaze.

dhoti: unstitched garment worn by men in the subcontinent. The long cloth is tied around the waist, passed between the legs and tucked in at the back. Much like sari for women, *dhoti* may be worn in different ways.

dupatta: long scarf worn by women in India.

dupatti: blanket

Gandaberunda: two-headed magical bird hybridised with other animals. The symbol is used in South Indian iconography as the emblem of royal families. It was the emblem of the Vijayanagara rulers of Southern Deccan in the fifteenth – sixteenth century

chhapna: from Hindi, to 'print.'

Gangamma: Goddess of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, tutelary of the Gollas and Yadavas. She is a major character in the narrative of the Katam Raju Katha. Gangamma may also be understood as goddess Ganga more widely known in the rest of India.

Mandahecchu: *adugukunetollu* caste (asking caste) to the Gollas and Yadavas in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The Mandahecchu narrate the Katam Raju Katha to the Gollas. Both castes are linked by service and duty.

Golla: pastoral caste of the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh region, also known in the rest of India, and particularly in the North, as Yadava.

Gond paintings: traditional painting produced by members of the Gond tribe from central India.

Gopi: milkmaids and Krishna's lovers.

gurukula: Indian religious and traditional education system where a Guru teaches pupils. In the context of craft production, *gurukula* refers to the passing down of knowledge from elders to younger apprentices, from father to sons.

kalam: pen made from a bamboo stick, sharpened at one end for fine writing and drawing.

Kalamkaris: literally translated as pen (*kalam*) work (*kari*), kalamkari is a hand-drawing technique that produced fine and intricate designs on a cloth which is then dyed. If the main characteristic of a *kalamkari* is to be hand-drawn, in the present-days, Kalamkaris have come to mean painted and dyed cloth from Sri Kalahasti as well as printed cloth from Machilipatnam, both located in Andhra Pradesh.

Katam Raju Katha: story of Katam Raju, the King-Hero of the Golla, pastoral caste of Andhra Pradesh.

katha: from Hindi, 'story'

kavadiya bhats: Bhats are the Genealogists of Western India (rajatshan and Guajarat) who use a wooden box that is unfolded with characters of the narratives (kavad) as a means of recording and performing the narratives of their patron castes.

khadi: hand spun and hand woven cotton. Popularized by Gandhi in pre-Independence India, *khadi* became the symbol of Indian's capacity for self-reliance as opposed to the British manufactured cotton production.

Krishna Lila (Leelalu in Telugu): religious play (*lila*) that dramatizes the story of the divine Krishna and his playful acts.

Kulapuranas: mythological narrative of the origin of a Kula (clan).

Kunapuli: *adugukunetollu* caste to the Padmasali. They perform the Markandeya and Bhavana rishi Purana in front of the Padmasalis.

haat: from Hindi 'market,' *haat* connotes a place where one finds all the useful things to purchase at one place. In more specific cases, *haat* would mean a cloth, spice, or toy market, in all their variety.

Jagannath: main deity worshipped in Orissa, particularly at Puri, an important pilgrimage site for Jagannath, the 'Lord of the Universe.' Jagannath is always accompanied by his brother Balabhadra and his sister Subhadra, and worshipped as a triad.

Jama: tight-fitting coat worn by men, fastened at the shoulder and waist.

kavad: story box and mobile temple that storytellers carry along with them as they unfold the narratives depicted on its different parts. *Kavads* are most popular in Rajasthan where the *kavadhya bhats* (genealogist using a *kavad*) go to their patrons and narrate their origins.

lalitasana: seating posture in which the left leg rests upon a seat and the right leg is left hanging.

Madhubani painting: painting tradition of the Mithila region in Northern Bihar. The paintings were initially produced by Brahman and Kayasta women on the walls of their homes. They are now widely known as to be paintings on paper under the name of Madhubani painting, from a larger nearby Mithila town.

Markandeya Purana: Sanskrit Puranic text of Hinduism, and one of the eighteen major Puranas (Maha-purana). Markandeya is a sage in Hindu mythology who is the central character of the Purana. The Purana is known for including the Devi Mahatmya within it, the oldest known treatise on Goddess worship, which makes it particularly important to Shaktism.

Mata ni pachedi: painted and/or printed wall hanging that serves as mobile temple for Goddess worship. These hangings are produced by the Waghri community, a 'polluted' caste initially forbidden from entering temples.

mela: from Hindi for 'fair,' '*mela'* is a bigger version of *haat* where the motivation is not only selling and shopping but also celebrating, interacting, and being entertained, through various activities such as eating, kid's games etc. *Mela* also connotes large religious gathering in India.

mitti: Telugu for 'clay.' In the context of this thesis, the Cheriyal craftsmen speak of *mitti* as a particular type of clay that is eaten and digested by snakes during the rainy season and which is best for making temple *murti.*

mirasi: in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, *mirasi* are hereditary rights over a certain numbers of villages in one particular area for a caste to provide service to its patrons. The jurisdiction is carefully respected and usually recorded on copper plates.

Modh baniya: merchant caste originally from Western India

mudra: codified hand gesture that convey specific meaning and emotions. A repertoire of *mudra* is found in the Natyashastra, the Sanskrit treatise for the performing arts.

murti: sacred image of a deity, usually a statue or in the form of painting. The sacred image may be anthropomorphic or not.

naqsh: Urdu for 'line.'

Netronmilana: 'opening of the eyes.' Sacred moment when a *murti*, whether painted or sculpted, is being given eyes, a metaphor for the sacredness and 'life' of the deity.

Pabuji: regional deified hero from Rajasthan, mostly worshipped by pastoral castes. A performance to Pabuji's various deeds is conducted by a *bhopa* and a *bhopi* and with the help of a large cloth-painting known as *phad* or *par*.

Paithan painting: painting tradition from the region of Pinguli in Maharashtra. The *Chitrakathi* paint the medium-size paper boards and use it as an aid in their storytelling performances.

pajama: loose trousers

pallu: loose end of a sari, usually decorate differently that the main body of the sari.

pat: piece of cloth used a support for painting in various regions of India.

Phad paintings: large cloth-painting that depicts the stories of Pabuji, Devnarayan or Ramdev, three local deities from Rajasthan, each worshipped majorly among pastoral castes in the region.

Pichwais: painted hangings illustrating the various seasons, months and days of Krishna as Srinathji. The paintings originate in Nathdwara in Rajasthan, where Srinathji's temple under the form of a *haveli* (mansion) is located.

pushti: Hindi for 'grace.'

poniki: from Telugu, white sander wood.

pothi: sets of paintings used by the *Chitrakathi* as they wander to narrate the stories depicted on it.

Puranas: in Sanskrit *purana* means "ancient" or "old." Purana is a narrative genre, mostly literary and in Sanskrit but found in regional languages, and as oral or visual narratives too. The Puranas tell the genealogies and founding myths of gods and goddesses, kings, heroes, sages, caste, clans and families, or temple site among others. There are eighteen *Maha Puranas* (Great Puranas) and eighteen *Upa Puranas* (Minor Puranas).

Rakshas: demons

Ramjanmabhumi: place of birth of Rama, associated with the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

Ramlila: religious play (*lila*) that enacts the story of Rama. It is usually enacted throughout the Hindi-speaking region of North India in autumn.

rishi: Sanskrit term for a professional sage. Rishis are also important spiritual figures and teachers as well as inspired beings. They play a major role in many of the Puranas.

sadapadma: standing posture, particularly known in the depiction of Krishna as Srinathji on Nathdwara paintings. The feet are opened at the toes but connected through at the heals, the knees are kept relaxed.

Samudra Manthan: Hindu mythological episode of the churning of the milk ocean. The churning of the milk ocean may be compared to a myth of creation in Hinduism where the ocean is churned by the equal forces of good and evil.

Shaktism: goddess worship tradition. Shakti means 'power' and symbolises the female power. Saktism is considered the divine female counterpart of Saivism and worship is often understood as Siva / Shakti.

Shtalapuranas: puranic texts that recount the mythical origins and traditions of a sacred place, usually temples and pilgrimage sites from Tamil Nadu.

Swayamvar: in the Ramayana, the ceremony held by Sita's father Dasaratha, to choose a suitable groom for his daughter.

Tanjore painting: painting tradition from the region of Thanjavur, previously Tanjore, known for being painted on wooden plank and decorated with vivid colours, gold foils, inlay glass beads and at times previous gems too. The paintings usually depict icons of Hindu deities.

tilaka: caste mark on one's forehead. On Srinathji's forehead, the *tilaka* is said to be the mark of Radha's footprint, Krishna's beloved.

toddy tree: palm tree as called in Telangana.

trimurti: triad of the main Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as respectively the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer of the universe.

Yagna: ritual of the fire sacrifice.

Chapter I

Introduction

1. Cheriyal paintings

Located in the midst of Telangana, Cheriyal is a village of the Warangal district, about two hundred kilometres north of Hyderabad. In the early 1980s, representatives of the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) arrived in Cheriyal with the intention to revive the declining activities of a painting family known as Nakashis. The two Nakashi brothers, Dhanalkoti Vaikuntam and Dhanalkoti Chandraiah were then living and working as painters in the village. Their father, Dhanalkoti Venkatramaiah had moved there in 1942-43, from the nearby village of Tippapuram, near the temple-town of Vemulawada in Warangal's neighbouring district Karimnagar.[1] D. Venkatramaiah was a maker and painter of wooden figurines and scrolls used in storytelling performances, portable shrines, and temple wall and *murtis* (statues). After he moved to Cheriyal, his two sons Vaikuntam and Chandraiah perpetuated the craft and continued making and painting the same objects from the new location. As the Board launched the revival and promotion of the Nakashis' craft, they coined the tradition under the name of the place where the last craftsmen were found, Cheriyal.

This research is about the continuity and changes in contemporary Cheriyal painting. Continuity and changes imply the existence of a reference point. When the AIHB came to Cheriyal, they proposed initiatives that should remedy the steady disappearance of the craft. They offered the craftsmen to produce small paintings for sale on the handicraft market in India, to participate in award competitions with other craftsmen and to perform some training of their craft to expand the production. This would increase the marketization of the paintings; hence support the continuity of the tradition. But this would also introduce a whole new painting environment with different formats, supports, techniques, new iconographies, and a wider range of patrons. In this context,

[1] Mittal Jagdish. *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. Hyderabad: Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, 2014, 15. and Thangavelu, Kirtana. "The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India." PhD Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1998, 32. both talk about the circumstances in which Venkatramaiah had to leave from his village.

the reference point for observing the continuity and changes in Contemporary Cheriyal paintings is located in what the paintings were before the incorporation of new elements into it. More than a time frame, it is about painting typologies and the reference point is the temple and scroll painting that were the basis of Nakashis' work as the AIHB decided to intervene. Similarly, this research is about contemporary Cheriyal paintings. The emphasis on contemporary is in fact an emphasis on its variety and entirety. Cheriyal painting in our present times still is painting on temple and painting on scroll as it were, in addition to paintings for museums, paintings for handicrafts emporia and paintings for private patrons and home decoration.

For these reasons, a study of contemporary Cheriyal painting should rather encompass what Cheriyal painting means in the eyes of those who constructed it, those who commission it, but also for the craftsmen who were chosen to represent it. It also demands equal considerations to its origin and its becoming. This is what I tried to put together in this thesis. I chose to approach Cheriyal paintings through their transformation over time, especially as they entered the institutional discourse of both the handicraft market and museums. The idea is to look at the painting, patrons and painters together dialogically, for how they have constructed and defined what Cheriyal paintings are, visually and discursively.

As the main axis of my thesis is the correlation between the materiality of the paintings to their environment of production, presentation and reception, there is no clear division between each entity in the thesis. Instead, I preferred to offer a semi chronological semi thematic structure where I begin with our reference point in the tradition, the paintings on temple wall and on scroll and figurines for performances, commissioned, produced and disseminated within the local communities of Telangana. This follows by what I call the process of institutionalisation of the Cheriyal painting tradition, in which they entered both museum and handicraft markets' discourse, and by the implications it had on the paintings, the painters and the patrons. Finally, I question the extent of the tradition in exploring several commissions that happened as a result of this institutionalisation. In continuity with our reference point in the paintings for the local communities and through changes that questions the extent of the tradition; I argue that contemporary Cheriyal painting is a patron-sensitive tradition, inevitably adapting to both the fixity and dynamism of its environment.

Because of the recent and arbitrary designation of the painting tradition, researching about contemporary Cheriyal painting could be misleading, and defining their pictorial features and evolution requires broader considerations. There is no record of any academic writing using the term 'Cheriyal' to talk about this painting tradition. Furthermore, the literature on the subject always considered only one dimension of these paintings, which is a scroll painted as a visual aid to the performance of local caste genealogical stories, therefore discarding other types of paintings.

Kirtana Thangavelu and Jagdish Mittal, who constituted the bulk of scholarship on the subject both, limited their purview to these scrolls for performances, referring to it as "Deccani,"[2] or "of Telangana"[3] and taking into consideration broader geographical coverage of the combined tradition. While Thangavelu did bring the present of the scroll tradition in the 1990s, Mittal only concentrated on eighteenth and nineteenth century material. This only takes into consideration a history and the continuity of these paintings but not their becoming. Cheriyal painting nowadays means something radically different than the scroll paintings for performances. Painting for the local communities is now secondary and keeps decreasing in favour of national commissions, either institutional or commercial, which is what I would like to bring in this thesis too.

From these premises, I will now present the subject more in depth through its relation to the literature. I would refer to Deccani and Telangana scrolls throughout the review of secondary material, firstly because the term 'Cheriyal' was not yet in use and secondly, because this material also refers only to the scroll for performances of storytelling and nothing else. 'Cheriyal' painting is my own input as I chose to look at the paintings from the key moment of their revival by the AIHB therefore from their renaming too. This subject having received little attention from scholarship, it was possible to review all the secondary sources on the subject extensively and chronologically before investigating similar issues on other craft tradition from different regions of India.

[2] Mittal. *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*.
[3] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*

2. Literature Review

a. Cheriyal scrolls for performance of the caste Puranas.

Since the scrolls and wooden figurines used for performances have been the sole focus of the literature on the Cheriyal painting production, it is also the only source of information about the tradition as a whole. The first three chapters of the thesis too, concentrate on the painting produced in the context of performance and set the reference point from which I explore the continuity and changes in the Cheriyal painting tradition.

The paintings for performance emerge out of a fixed patronage system that involves their painters, the performers of the narrative that use them, and the patrons of the performance, all belonging to the low service castes of Telangana. The performers are attached to their patrons, from whom they owe their livelihood in performing the caste's genealogical narratives with the help of visual props. As these painting props are too old to be used, new ones are commissioned before disposing the older ones into the water. For this reason, scrolls and figurines are rarely preserved and only few objects are available in private and museum collections.

Probably due to their impressive format and narratives, the scrolls have received comparatively more attention than the figurines and it is possible to find several examples in museum and private collections. The Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian art in Hyderabad constitutes the most important collection of these scrolls from Telangana. Mittal holds the oldest surviving scroll dating from 1625. Apart from this unique example, most of the scrolls in his collection and elsewhere date from the eighteenth and nineteenth century and from the 1990s onwards.

b. Chronological survey of secondary sources

The first mention about the scroll paintings from Telangana in the literature comes from a 1963 "Portfolio," written by Stuart C. Welch, Richard Ettinghausen and Jagdish Mittal, in a Marg publication called *Deccani Kalams.*[4] Mittal remains the authority on the subject of scroll paintings from Telangana. He collected his first scrolls in the early

[4] Welch S., Ettinghausen R. and Mittal J. "Portfolio" *Marg, A Magazine of the Arts*, Vol. XVI (March 1963): pp. 7-22.

1960s, around the same time as he brought the painting to the literature in *Deccani Kalams.* The "Portfolio" proposes three illustrations of the painting tradition of the Nakashi. The accompanying notices are uncertain and there is no reference as yet to the scroll painting tradition. It is mentioned however that the work is contemporary and from the region of Nalgonda and Cheriyal, both in Telangana. The first one is painted on cloth and the second on a temple door and both share similar organisation of the pictorial space into register. This is a particular feature of the Cheriyal paintings seen on various supports until now. Temple doors, scrolls and portable shrines are still painted in Cheriyal, for the local communities, which I shall talk about in the first three chapters.

Kay Talwar and Kalyan Krishna's 1979 catalogue of the *Indian pigment painting on cloth* from the Calico Museum collection provides the second reference to the painting tradition of Telangana in the literature.[5] The museum collection displays one scroll of the Markandeya Purana dated from the late eighteenth century, which is partly reproduced in this catalogue. The Markandeya Purana is narrated by the Kunapulis for the Padmasalis, the weavers of Telangana. In spite of the doubtful dating of the painting and the absence of reference to its function, it is the first time that one describes each register of the painting, attempting the identification of characters and elements of the highly localised narratives. The painting is attributed to the "Varangal" district, in Telangana where Cheriyal is located too.[6]

In 1987 the Metropolitan Museum of Art published *India: Art and Culture,*[7] and brought the Telangana scrolls to a wider audience, especially outside India. Mittal wrote the piece on the Telangana scroll tradition and reproduced for the first time the oldest scroll from his collection, a 1625 Markandeya Purana.[8] This is also the first time one comes across the peculiar function of these scroll: that of supporting the performance of local caste Puranas in Telangana. This peculiarity is also what Jyotindra Jain and Aarti Aggarwala emphasised in 1989 with the *National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum*

[5] Talwar, Kay, and Kalyan Krishna. *Indian Pigment Paintings On Cloth*. Ahmedabad: B. U. Balsari on behalf of Calico Museum of Textiles, 1979.
[6] Ibid., 119.
[7] Welch, Stuart Cary, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.). *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art : Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985.
[8] Ibid., 51.

New Delhi (Crafts Museum) catalogue.[9] Another sample of the Markandeya Purana is reproduced in the catalogue, similar in style to that of the Calico but dated a century later, which is more probably the case for the Calico too. It is also in Jain and Aggarwala's catalogue of two hundred of the Crafts Museum objects that for the first time, several "lesser-known" traditions of painting in India have been gathered together and approached through their similar function, either religious, decorative or narrative.[10] I shall develop more on this in the second part of this literature review.

In 1998, a bit less than ten years after the Crafts Museum catalogue, the Telangana scrolls received particular attention across two important publications and a PhD thesis. In *Picture Showmen,* Jain proposes to look at the case of mendicant traditions in India that uses visual aid in their storytelling. [11] Mittal wrote a piece on the Telangana scrolls and Thangavelu wrote another on the wooden figurines. As in Jain's Crafts Museum catalogue, the focus was on presenting the particularity of these paintings mentioned earlier, which is to depict local caste stories. Both essays contributed to increasing awareness about the painting tradition of Telangana but also about the "lesser-known" painting tradition that support narrative performances across India.[12]

Mittal's *The Painted Scrolls of the Deccani Picture Showmen: Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century* in Jain's book introduces the context of production of the scroll paintings, the painters, and the technique but most importantly it proposes for the first time an attempt at stylistic analysis of the paintings. Following the underlined case of the 1963 "Portfolio," *Picture Showmen* essay replaces the scrolls in the continuity of the Vijayanagara temple paintings, especially those of the ceiling of the Virabhadra Temple at Lepakshi. The artists would have moved northwards at the fall of the Empire in 1565.[13] Though the filiation is plausible, Mittal does not provide any evidence or visual comparison to support his proposition in neither the *Deccani Kalam* nor the *Picture Showmen.* This nevertheless offers a starting point to thinking about the history of a

[9] Jain Jyotindra, and Aggarwala Aarti, *National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, New Delhi*. Mapin Pub., 1989
[10] Ibid., 102.
[11] Jain Jyotindra *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*. Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of National Centre for the Performing Arts, 1998
[12] Mittal Jagdish. "The Painted Scrolls of the Deccani Picture Showmen: Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century" in *Picture Showmen: Insights Into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, National Centre for the Performing Arts (India), and Jyotindra Jain, Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of National Centre for the Performing Arts, 1998, 56-65.
[13] Ibid., 62.

folk painting tradition that is attached to performances, itself attached to caste genealogies, both heavily relying on oral transmission and offering very little literary records to delve into. I chose to approach the complexity of the tradition's history in Chapter 2, including considerations for both the Vijayanagara temple paintings and other folk art forms that serve narrative purpose in other regions of India. The conclusion of Mittal's essay in *Picture Showmen* for the first time locates and acknowledges the tradition as "Cheriyal paintings."[14]

In the same year Barbara Rossi published her exhibition catalogue on *India's Popular Paintings 1589 to the Present*. [15] Following Mildred Archer's usage of 'popular' rather that folk, she compiles a deep and reliable study of Indian popular paintings, from ritual floor painting to didactic puppet practises.[16] One of her chapters covers the narrative traditions and presents several storytelling practises among them the Telangana scrolls.[17] If Rossi does not bring any further information on the scroll tradition, the exhibition methodology uses systematic comparison of the same theme in different traditions, therefore opening possibilities for connections between several of these "popular" art forms in India. She also challenges Mittal's monopole on the scroll material by illustrating the section on the "Andhra or Telangana scroll paintings" with two samples coming from private collections, in America and in India, and never published before.[18]

One of the most important references on the Telangana scrolls comes from Thangavelu's PhD thesis submitted in 1998 at the University of California, Berkeley.[19] Thangavelu's research is not only key to the study of the scroll tradition in Telangana, it is also the only extensive work written about it. She proposed an empirical study of the scrolls for performances, based on intensive fieldwork with painters, performers and patrons, in Cheriyal and Telangana. She sees the perpetuation of the tradition as a result of a responsible system of patronage that keeps it at the same time conservative and

[14] Ibid. 65.
[15] Rossi, Barbara et al., *From the Ocean of Painting: India's Popular Paintings, 1589 to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
[16] Library, India Office and M. Archer. *Indian Popular Painting in the India Office Library*. H. M. Stationery Off., 1977, 1.
[17] Rossi Barbara. "Paintings from Popular Narrative Traditions" in *From the Ocean of Painting: India's Popular Paintings, 1589 to the Present,* Barbara Rossi et al., 1998, 90-145.
[18] Ibid., 94-95.
[19] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*

responsive to its context.[20] This is something particularly relevant to what I choose to do in my own research and I apply the responsiveness of the tradition to the current contexts of the Cheriyal painting production. She collected extensive data on the paintings but also recorded and translated one full performance of the Madel Purana, the narrative of the washermen caste known as Chakkali in Telangana. In spite of mentioning the production of other smaller painting for the handicraft market, Thangavelu's work however ignores entirely the production of other paintings than the scrolls.

In 2010, Anna L. Dallapiccola compiled a catalogue of *South Indian Painting* from the British Museum.[21] The museum has two scrolls in his collection, a Markandeya Purana from the late eighteenth century and another of the Madel Purana from the early 1900s, as well as a fragment of a Markandeya Purana from the later eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Dallapiccola's input here is valuable for two reasons. The first one is due to her description of the scroll's episodes in great detail that takes the Calico's attempt to identify these complex local narratives further.[22] The second one is due to the framework in which she places the Telangana scrolls. The scrolls take part in the section on "Painted Narratives" alongside kalamkari temple hangings from further south in Andhra Pradesh and Paithan paintings on board from the Deccan.[23] These three painting traditions share important similarities in technique, function and style which I intent to compare in Chapter 2 as I propose an alternative approach to the history of Cheriyal paintings.

In 2011, Dallapiccola brought together various scholarship contributions on *Indian Paintings: The Lesser-Known Traditions*, therefore continuing Jain's efforts to increase scholarship on the subject. Thangavelu wrote an essay on *Oral and Performative Dimensions of a Painted Scroll from Telangana*,[24] which was also her last publication since she submitted her PhD.

[20] Ibid., 383.
[21] British Museum., and Anna L. Dallapiccola. *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*. London: British Museum Press, 2010.
[22] Ibid., 227-235.
[23] Ibid., 224-295.
[24] Thangavelu K. "Oral and Performative Dimensions of a Painted Scroll from Telangana" in *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*, ed. Anna L. Dallapiccola, New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011, 126-137.

We had to wait for 2014 to see the first published monograph on the subject of Deccani scroll paintings by Mittal.[25] Jain's intervenes in the preface and places Mittal's work into the broader framework of studies on Indian visual folklore. Unfortunately the book remains introductory and does not fulfil the expectation of a monograph on the subject. The large set of original material it illustrates provides valuable visual support for further study of the pictorial aspects of the scrolls and allowed me to have few of the scrolls reproduced in the thesis as well. Each scroll is also accompanied with a short description of the narrative, regrettably not associated to its illustration. Accurate descriptions of the narratives on the scrolls remain to be done to date, as my research does not unfortunately propose more than Mittal in this area. Finally, Mittal proposes a short history for these paintings, insisting on the connection with the Lepakshi murals but this time corroborated with more convincing comparisons.

Mittal gave the first real input to the research on Telangana scrolls in 1963, and maintained a monopoly yet introductory discourse, with his important collection of scrolls, until his recent publication in 2014. In the late 1990s, Thangavelu provided the first extensive research and contextualization of the scrolls into their environment of production, presentation and reception. Jain, who took up the directorship of the Crafts Museum in New Delhi in 1984, was a key figure in the development of regional art forms across India. He participated in maintaining a regular interest for Cheriyal painting across several publications from the 1980s onwards, and he shares with Dallapiccola's most recent publication, the efforts towards expanding scholarships on Indian regional and folk art forms.

c. **Critical survey of secondary sources**

This chronological survey of secondary sources provided a ground to understand the key aspects that have been developed in the literature on Cheriyal painting. At present, I would like to comment on what I propose to do with regards to this material and how I intend to approach the first three content chapters of the thesis (Chapter 2, 3, and 4), all of them dealing with the painting for local communities and particularly the scrolls, therefore related to secondary literature more directly than the other sections of the thesis.

[25] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 218.

With the exception of Thangavelu's thesis, there is no extended research on these paintings, particularly on the idea of continuity and contemporaneity.[26] My research comes here as complements to her work and proposes to take the paintings further from where she left them. For this reason, I propose to summarise her observation in Chapter 3, bringing my own understanding of the patronage system behind the production of a scroll and the delivery of a performance. This chapter will remain introductory and can only go as far as offering up to date material on the paintings for the local communities around Cheriyal, the caste for which the narratives are performed, the performers who deliver the performance, and the painters who make the objects. In addition to this, I propose to introduce for the first time material on the paintings on temple wall and the making of temple *murti* by the Cheriyal painters, reinforcing my argument on the federating role of painting within the low castes of Telangana.

Once I establish the role of painting in Telangana, I choose to look at the paintings for performances. Because these paintings support the genealogical narratives of particular low castes for which legitimization and validation by higher authorities was necessary at some point in time, the relation between the caste narrative and a more authoritative Purana is sought after. The caste's validation works through a fixed narrative that locates their origin in the main Hindu deities and that has always been doing so. The most extensively collected scroll is that of the Markandeya Purana, for which the Calico, the Crafts Museum and British Museum have one scroll each, and the Jagdish and Kamal Museum three. In fact, the Markandeya Purana refers to one of the eighteenth major Puranas of the Hindu tradition, which is not that narrated on the Telangana scrolls. Dallapiccola is the only one that takes into consideration this aspect in the 2011 British Museum catalogue, as she refers to the visual narrative as Bhavana Rishi's, the founder of the Padmasali weaving community for which the narrative is performed.[27]

In Chapter 4, I chose to delve into the issues that relate to dating and stylistic analysis of these scrolls through the case study of what I prefer to call the Padmasali Purana. I believe both Markandeya Purana and Bhavana Rishi story are not accurate designation for the narrative, although I do agree to their use in the context of these performances. Because of the availability of material from these three museums' publications, I

[26] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*
[27] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 227-235.

propose to look at the degree of fixity and change in the narrative. With another case study that uses figurines this time, that of the Katam Raju Katha narrative, performed by the Mandaheccus for the Gollas and Yadavas cow herders, this constitutes the first instance in the thesis where I question the continuity and change within the Cheriyal painting tradition.

Apart from the oldest scroll, each of the scrolls is dated of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. I would like to draw attention here to the uncertain dating of these scrolls. To date, there is no dating proposed for these scrolls in comparison, on the basis of style or any other method. Apart from a few of the scrolls bearing inscriptions on their transfer of ownership within the performing communities – which itself is not fully reliable - it is difficult to say with certitude whether these scrolls come from the same period. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that Cheriyal is the last remaining painting center for these scrolls but that there were several more throughout Telangana and possibly Andhra Pradesh too. For instance, a 2015 publication on *Kalamkari Temple Hangings* by Dallapiccola showed the presence of the Katam Raju Katha narrative in coastal Andhra, depicted on two hanging from 1881-2 Machilipatnam.[28] Kalamkaris are painted and dyed cloths with designs originally made with a kalam (pen), but nowadays printed as well. If the style is rather different, it is important to see that the Katam Raju narrative was - and possibly still is - in circulation in other parts of the southern country too. In chapter 4, as I compare five scrolls of the Markandeya Purana, I also consider the possibility of two scrolls from the same period on the basis of their inscription, but possibly from two different painting centers, on the basis of stylistic differences. Unfortunately, strict focus on the scroll is not what I propose in this thesis and the work of dating and locating the available scrolls remains to be done.

On the basis of the several issues and shortcomings highlighted in the secondary literature on Cheriyal painting, I have constructed three chapters. The first one (Chapter 2) proposes an alternative history to the Cheriyal scroll. This takes into consideration Mittal's possible origin of the scroll in the temple paintings of the Vijayanagara period but also the paintings that Jain, Rossi, and Dallapiccola consider as "folk", "popular" and "lesser-known." The second chapter (Chapter 3) looks at paintings for the local communities around Cheriyal, updating the situation on scroll painting from

[28] Dallapiccola, Anna L. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2015.

Thangavelu's last research, but also introducing temple paintings for the first time. This highlights the significant role of painting in the Telangana region. Finally, I initiate my enquiry about the continuity and change in the Cheriyal tradition in Chapter 4, with a focus on the paintings for performances, both on scroll and on figurines. I argue then that fixity and change within the tradition depend on the function of these painting, therefore on their patron.

As a conclusion, I would like to mention briefly what these three chapters do not intend to do. As the focus of this thesis is not on the paintings for performance, I do not have the ambition to propose an in-depth historical research on the tradition in Chapter 2. Instead, I am interested in proposing an alternative methodology for tracing the history of the Cheriyal tradition. This relies on considering potential movements rather than searching for a beginning and allows the possibility of connections between several folk art forms as a potent tool to inform this history. The second point echoes the previous and concerns the focus of this thesis which is the contemporary Cheriyal paintings and not on the scroll and figurines for performances. In Chapter 3, I present an up-to-date list of communities that still perform and commission scrolls or figurines to the Cheriyal painters. Unfortunately, I am not equipped to give a summary of each narrative, neither to identify each register of the scrolls I offer in illustration. This would have been another research, entirely based on the visual Puranas of Telangana, leaving aside the continuity and changes in the tradition and overlapping with Thangavelu's work.

My own research starts where Mittal's ends and intends to reduce the content of the scroll for performances presented here to an equal part with other types of Cheriyal paintings. I wish to take the subject further by looking at what the tradition has become without favours or judgment of value. I believe Cheriyal painting to be interesting particularly because of its versatility and capacity to answer its contemporaneity. The first three chapters of the thesis function as laying the research ground, at the same time historical and contextual. It proposes to establish the present of Cheriyal painting with regards to its past i. e. the scrolls for performances, and in the context of local communities in Telangana. As I already explained, the bulk of secondary literature consists of studies that focus on the scrolls too, which is why I apprehended both together alongside.

In contrast, the other three chapters of the thesis look forward to Cheriyal paintings' contemporaneity and to its potential to exceed the tradition as it were within the communities. These new prospects for the paintings were made possible through their inclusion into institutional discourses, that of craft within the Indian handicraft sector (government and market) and art within museums. These two new environments provided new meanings to the paintings inasmuch as the paintings served these institutions' intentions. This argument is what constitutes the core of this thesis on the continuity and changes in the Cheriyal painting tradition. In order to understand each of these two institutional entities, it was important to look at the literature in relation to these separately and in greater detail, which I chose to do in Chapter 5 and 6, and wherever relevant. Instead I focus the second part of this review of the literature on the study of "lesser-known" tradition and its methodological tenets, to which the study of Cheriyal paintings contributes.[29]

d. **Cheriyal painting as crafts**

When the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB), now Development Commissioner (DC) of Handicraft arrived in Cheriyal in the 1980s, they were going to change not only the materiality of the painting but also how one should categorise them. Because of the utilitarian purpose of these paintings and their hand manufacturing, but more significantly because of the ministry that took up the task of its revival, Cheriyal painting became an Indian handicraft.

Paul Greenhough in *Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed,* discusses the intervention of the Crafts Museum into the fate of Indian hand manufacture. The Crafts Museum was founded in 1952 much with the intention of sustaining Indian crafts and national identity construction at the same time. Greenhough looks at two models for "India's cultural trajectory," one being the "modernization theory" and the other "cultural preservationist."[30] As the first one regards the disappearance of crafts as a sign of progress, it did not satisfy Indian nationalists who prefer to see craft as an alternative to European products, best illustrated by the Swadeshi movement initiated in the early

[29] Talwar, K, and Kalyan K. *Indian Pigment Paintings On Cloth*. 102. and Dallapiccola, Anna L., ed. *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011.
[30] Greenough, Paul. "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi." In *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, edited by Carol A. Brenckenridge, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 232.

1900s. Cultural preservationist instead, seeks for halting the destruction of craft in redefining its qualities, hence preserving whatever remained of a great past tradition.[31] The reason why I chose to explain this is because most of the early writing on Indian craft between the 1900s and the 1980s was tinted with this cultural preservationist tone. Stella Kramrisch, Ananda Coomarswamy and Mulk Raj Anand in pre-Independence India and Kamaladevi Chattophadya and Papul Jayakar in post-Independence, all saw craft and craftsmen as reflections of the great Indian past, and its rural and ritual dimensions.

The study of Indian crafts took a different turn from the 1980s onwards, especially with Jyotindra Jain's anthropological approach to the study of visual folklore. Extensive research on Gujarati folk and tribal art forms but also on numerous others regional practises led to the publication of interdisciplinary monographs that brought about art historical concerns to the study of painting crafts. [32] This impulse did not only bring to light previously unknown traditions such as Madhubani painting for instance, it also brought ethnographic and anthropological perspectives to the subject.[33] For instance, in *Painted Myths of Creation,* Jain discussed the difficulty in dissociating the paintings of Pithoro murals from the performance with which they are associated. This is substantiated by extensive description of the painting process and rituals and field material, which greatly influenced my approach to Cheriyal paintings. The growing interest for the Telangana scrolls in the 1980s (1979 Calico publication and 1987 Jain and Crafts Museum publication) benefited from this democratisation of knowledge around regional art forms.

Economically, the first half of the 1980s in India corresponds with the sixth five-year plan that allocated more than triple the subsidies to handlooms and handicrafts in comparison with the previous 1974-1979 plan.[34] It is also the decade that saw the development of the *Festivals of India*, promoting Indian national culture abroad, starting with Britain in 1981 and expanding to the rest of Europe and the USA until the 1990s, therefore taking further the democratization of Indian crafts and folklore to the global

[31] Ibid.
[32] Jain, Jyotindra. and Ganga Devi. *Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting*: Mapin Pub., 1997. and Jain, J., *Painted Myths of Creation: Art and Ritual of an Indian Tribe*: Lalit Kalā Akademi, 1984.
[33] Jain. and Devi. *Ganga Devi: Tradition and Expression in Mithila Painting*.
[34] Cable, V., Weston A., and Jain L.C., *The Commerce of Culture: Experience of Indian Handicrafts*: Lancer International, 1986, 8.

market. In 1998, Jain curated the exhibition, *Other Masters*[35]. The exhibition catalogue brought together essays about museology and the 'contemporary artistic' dimension of these regional art forms. The catalogue discusses the movement of folk art and crafts objects to museum institutions which is something I propose too with Cheriyal paintings in Chapter 6. If this exhibition presented art forms that had already been institutionalised such as Madhubani paintings from Bihar or Gond paintings from Madhya Pradesh, it nonetheless formulates the necessity to study local Indian art forms within the global market and museum context. Cheriyal painting are attached to the local community for which the paintings are produced. As they entered institutional discourse, they inevitable approached national and international concerns too.

e. **The "Lesser-known traditions"[36]**

Jain in 1989 and Dallapiccola in 2011, propose a terminological alternative in using the "lesser-known" label rather than 'folk.'[37] In this category, Jain includes paintings for rituals and narrative, acknowledging the overlapping possibilities of these arbitrary divisions. We are then looking at "Magic diagrams" drawn on the floor, wall paintings for domestic and ritual purpose, and the "*Chitrakatha"* the narrative paintings on scrolls or panels. Garoda scroll paintings from Gujarat, the *pothi* (sets) of paper panels from Maharashtra, the Bengali *pat* and Telangana scrolls constitutes these lesser-known narrative traditions.

The association of these paintings under their narrative dimension was taken further in *Picture Showmen* that concentrated solely on the objects, especially paintings used for storytelling performances. In *South Indian Paintings* Dallapiccola similarly compares the Telangana scrolls to the Paithan paintings from Maharashtra and to kalamkaris from Andhra Pradesh, all related by their narrative dimension. These paintings do not only share their narrative dimension but material and stylistic elements which brings the possibility of further connection between regional development which is what I explore in Chapter 2.

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[35] Jain, Jyotindra. *Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India*: Crafts Museum and the Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India, 1998.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Dallapiccola, ed. *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*.

Jain was a precursor in the changing methodologies to approach folk and tribal art forms in India, but various other researches followed and contributed to the broadening knowledge on the subject. Bengali folklore has received earlier, and comparatively more attention than other folk art forms in the country. This is partly due to the fact that Bengali culture served as a representative of Indian pre-Independence nationalism. The Bengali *pat* painting for instance, started being collected early as a source of inspiration for the Modernist artist of the Bengal School that turned to vernacular folklore as a counter to European influences, but also as part of the government's investigation into Indian culture.[38]

If first research on Bengali *pat* paintings may have emerged in the colonial context, most recent research have been particularly interested in the paintings' capacity to adapt to its contemporaneity whilst maintaining its traditional appeal. Like the Cheriyal scrolls, Bengali *pat* paintings are unfolded during the performance of narrative stories depicted on the scroll. The Bengali scrolls however, depict mythological and moralising stories, but also up-to-date global news, unlike the Cheriyal scrolls. Because of the inclusion of contemporary and secular iconography into the scroll and into the performance, Roma Chatterji qualifies the Bengali *pat* painting tradition as the "mass media of the local." [39] This is supported by Frank Korom who goes further in questioning the use of the term tradition in view of the scroll's adaptation to the contemporary world. [40]

The manifestation of contemporaneity through changes in iconography has been extensively looked for the Bengali scrolls, and approached differently for other traditions. Kavita Singh for instance, as she looks at *phad* paintings (cloth paintings) from Rajasthan, proposes to understand the fixity of the painting from the past until our present-day. She reaches the conclusion that such conservatism is in fact a choice that supports the function of the painting and the performance for which it is produced.[41] Scrolls of the Cheriyal painting tradition too, share this purposeful fixity in the narrative

[38] Ghosh, Pika. "The Story of a Storyteller's Scroll." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 37 (2000): 176.
[39] Chatterji Roma. "Global Events and Local Narratives: 9/11 and the Picture Storytellers of Bengal", *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, No. 9 (2009): 1-26.
[40] Korom, Frank. J. *Village of Painters: Narrative Scrolls from West Bengal*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006.
[41] Kavita Singh has written several articles about the Phad paintings from Rajasthan. The most recent is Singh, K. "Transfixed by the arrow of time: Phad paintings of Rajasthan." in Dallapiccola, A. L., ed. *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*. 2011. 108-125.

and in the style for the purpose of serving the patron's interests, so far that the scroll is called a copy of the previous. I develop this further in Chapter 4. As the painters of the Rajasthani *phad*, Cheriyal painters are capable and willing to innovate and paint differently as long as it is understood by their patrons which I illustrate with most recent commissions of Cheriyal paintings in Chapter 7. The connection between Rajasthani *phad* and Cheriyal painting does not stop at their purposeful stylistic fixity but both share other aspects of the painting and the tradition in general, which I develop in Chapter 2.

In fact, these folk traditions have a lot in common and it is particularly interesting to see how much one may speak for the other. Dallapiccola whose focus in more on southern Indian developments, proposed an insight into the Paithain paintings from Maharashtra, as well as the kalamkaris from Southern Andhra Pradesh.[42] These two particular traditions, in addition to the Telangana scrolls, have been gathered in her catalogue of the *South Indian Paintings at the British Museum* under the "painted narratives."[43] Each of them shares stylistic or functional features with another, building a net of regional painting development and drawing pictorial if not any other connection between regions as they cross another. Starting from the Telangana scroll, I propose a short survey of these connections in Chapter 2.

The lesser-known traditions I chose to cite here are far from representing all what has recently been made available to the public, neither did I covered all possible connections between them. What I tried to do instead is giving an idea of the transferability of issues from one of these traditions to another. In the coming section, I deal with the theoretical methodology of my research and propose to approach other studies of folk traditions and crafts that do not necessarily share the narrative dimension, neither format nor pictorial connection with the Cheriyal scroll but that did shape the research extensively, especially for methodological reasons.

[42] Dallapiccola Anna. L. "'Paithan' Paintings: The Epic World of the Chitrakathis," in Jain. J. *Picture Showmen: Insights Into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, 1998. 66-73.
[43] British Museum., and Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*. 224-295.

3. Theoretical framework

The distribution of scholarship on Indian art and painting usually favours particular regions and practises. Architecture and sculpture tend to be most representative of 'ancient' Indian art and constitute a good majority of a work surveying the subject. In term of painting, courtly miniatures especially Mughal but also Rajput, Rajasthani and Deccani Schools have received most of the attention. Comparatively, more localised painting traditions often designated as (visual) folklore, and which are usually little or not related to courtly developments, have been little studied. Subodh Chandra and Heinz Mode in *Indian Folk Art*, locate this disparity in the nature of folklore. To them, "folk art was far more subject to the influence of court and orthodox temple art and hence to a process of integration. Consequently, it is much more difficult to distinguish clearly between what is and what is not folk art or to define the true nature of the latter." [44] The "process of integration" is particularly important to understand these folk art forms which unlike popular belief, usually embrace change and influences over time. Locating them historically therefore becomes more difficult, so does the definition of their features and finding an appropriate designation.

a. The "cultural biographies" of craft objects[45]

Very much responsive to the "process of integration," Cheriyal paintings may be defined in various ways. The Telangana painting tradition, as scrolls and temple, is part of the local folklore of Telangana, created for the local by the local. Because of their primary function which is utilitarian and most importantly due to the discourse of the handicraft government and market sectors, the paintings are considered as a national craft. Within the museum walls, they turn into Art. In fact, we are talking about the same objects but designated differently; and defining each of these categories much depend on the institutional framework that constructed these definitions hence it becomes relevant only in relation to them. For this reason, across the thesis, I chose to shift freely from Cheriyal painting as folklore, tradition, craft, and art as it is in fact everything, depending on where the objects are 'living.'[46] An alternative was to refer to

[44] Mode, Heinz Adolf, and Subodh Chandra. *Indian Folk Art*. New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1985. 243

[45]Kopytoff Igor. "The Cultural Biographies of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 64-91.

[46] Ibid.

them as paintings as much as I could which I believed was the most neutral due to its descriptive nature.

In the context of Chapter 5 and 6 about the institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting as first craft and second art, I refer to researches that have worked on the different 'lives' of objects as they move from one environment to another. This approach, from Arjun Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* but particularly from Igor Kopytoff *The Cultural Biography of Things* in the same volume, is particularly relevant to the study of objects like Cheriyal paintings, who are created within one particular context, commoditised or institutionalised by another and finally singularised at its reception to become something else than what it was at its production.[47] This is a fundamental methodological tool to my own research too as I do no isolate the painting but always consider them within their context of commission, production, and reception. Like Kopytoff too, the becoming of Cheriyal painting finds more relevance than a state of being which I hope to convey in this research.[48]

Going about the biography of objects implies one primary focus, that of objects. The objects however in this context, become relevant only with regards to the different environments, spaces, "worlds"[49] or "lives,"[50] they traverse. Because of this, the objects and their contexts will always be apprehended together. This is particularly complex as there will always be the reflection of an authority in the way these biographies are presented, mostly due to disciplinary and methodological biases. This has been the case with several studies of several different craft objects in contemporary India that I would like to discuss with regards to my own.

1. *The objects and their Institutions*

A common ground to several biographies of these objects has been the importance of their institutions, what Helle Bundgaard calls 'crafts worlds.' Bundgaard chose to make these crafts institutions the focus of her research on Orissan pattachitras.[51] The pattachitras are painting on *pat* (cloth), initially painted for pilgrims to take home after

[47] Ibid., 65. Institutionalisation is my addition to the processes of singularisation and recommoditization.
[48] Ibid., 65.
[49] Bundgaard, Helle, and Nordisk Institut for Asienstudier. *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*. Richmond: Curzon, 1999.
[50] Kopytoff I., "The Cultural Biographies of Things."
[51] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*.

their visit to the Jagannath temple at Puri. After their revival and due to the further intervention of several regional, state and national institutions, a small village named Raghurajpur where the paintings are painted gained a special status and attracted numerous new painters but also middlemen, modifying the precepts of the painting tradition. Bundgaard focuses on these institutions from where she looks at the paintings and painters and their art historical concerns.

Eiluned Edwards in her research on *Textiles and Dress of Gujarat*[52] considers the government craft related and design schools of Gujarat as well but unlike Bundgaard, this constitutes the conclusion of her argument as she concentrates on textiles and dress as material culture of the region, relevant to the people that produce and wear them. She also adopts a technical point of view to the study of her object. The intervention of institutions in her research comes to bring about matters of continuity and sustainability of the communities through their objects.

Both take into consideration the two aspects of the tradition they look at, on the one side the objects as material culture of the people that interact with them, and the objects as commoditisation once they entered the institutional discourse. The only difference is their emphasis which is on the former for Edwards and on the latter for Bundgaard. With Cheriyal paintings, I take into consideration both these aspects as well but bend more towards Bundagaard's focus on institutions. Above all, all share a focus on the object, on what it reveals about their environments, and I believe the difference of focus is only a result of disciplinary and methodological approach.

Not only methodological differences influence the way one looks at these objects. The nature of these objects too, imposes certain methods to look at them, and I would say that there may be as many methodological options as there are objects. If we look at Bundgaard research again, she considers pattachitras as tourist art and she does present the anthropology of tourist art as an important framework for her objects.[53] Evidently, this does not diminish the importance of pattachitras within the local communities but the relations they have with their consumers will determine the framework in which to consider them too, i. e. tourism. Textiles and dress as objects are much more directly

[52] Edwards, Eiluned. *Textiles and Dress of Gujarat*. London : Ahmedabad: V & A Publishing, 2011.
[53] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*, 6-7.

attached to the people who wear them everyday. This makes them all the more relevant to the communities that wear them which is what Edwards showed.

In the case of Cheriyal paintings, the paintings do not direct the enquiry towards tourist art as they never were on the tourist market before the intervention of the handicraft sector, whereas the pattachitras were. To some extent, the handicraft market could be seen as a continuity of the tourist / pilgrim market already in place for pattachitras which was not the case for Cheriyal paintings. The handicraft market was an alien customer. What is common between the two however is the handicraft market becoming their major patron but also an intermediary between the paintings and the tourist buyers. At the risk of omitting the consumers that buy the paintings and their relation to the objects, I choose to look at the handicraft market in priority. Bundgaard's folklorisation of rural Indian for elite consumer is something I have not approached at all and that remains to be done.

In this way, Cheriyal paintings may relate more closely to Edwards's textile, relevant to the people who consume / wear them. Cheriyal are 'consumed' by people who have something to say through paintings, first the patron who commissions the performance of their caste genealogies and second, the State which constructs the nation with the handicraft sector, and then, any other individual or museum with their own internal politics. This was to direct the research towards the patron.

2. *Museums*

This is also the reason why museums became important for my enquiry about Cheriyal paintings. As important sites of contestations, their intervention but also their role as patrons linked with the lives of these objects. The inclusion of a chapter on museums has been particularly challenging for there have been comparatively fewer studies on their intervention into Indian craft than the handicraft sector. Most of the time too, working on museum and their objects consists of a rather undefined field of enquiry where information is scattered among theories of collecting, colonial encyclopaedic habit, museology, and public culture. The variety of Indian museums however, makes the subject very exciting but too rarely seen in the context of the relation with their objects. I hope to bring about some of these issues in Chapter 6 and that the introductory nature of the chapter will allow further research to develop. Contemporary Indian craft

is caught in between objectification as material culture and sacralised universal knowledge, without having to choose one or the other, therefore reflecting best the infiltration of folklore into various social spheres, through museum institutions.

3. Rituals and the artists

Before I conclude, I would like to approach two aspects of these social biographies of objects that I believe attempt at correcting old habits in looking at Indian art as per two of Coomaraswamy's ideals: rituals and the 'artists.' Each of the studies on the lives of objects, including mine to a certain extent; do replace the objects into their 'original' context within the communities. This quite naturally falls into the local religious practices and rituals, and into the object's key position within these. Bundgaard's chapter on painting for ritual purposes however, justifies it because of the impact it had on the tourist painting and because it contributed to the understanding of the painters' priorities in tourist paintings.[54]

Tryna Lyons, whose research on *The Artists of Nathdwara*, focuses majorly on paintings that are used in religious contexts, however approaches the religiosity with regards to its pictorial translation.[55] The Cheriyal scrolls, very much alike the *phad* from Rajasthan or the kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, function as mobile temples and do partake in local rituals. What I chose however is to consider this aspect as one of the multiple aspects as Bundgaard and Lyons did. In doing so, I opted for Edwards' understanding of the objects as material culture of the community and tried to search for secularised meaning behind religiosity as well (Chapter 3). This might have been ambitious but perhaps offered further avenues to approach Indian art, not only religious, not only religious among other necessities, but religious because of other necessities. I think the case of Cheriyal paintings highlights this quite well.

The second and final point I would like to discuss is the position of the makers of these objects in these various studies. Craftsmen, painters, artists, they may be referred to differently but all are the makers of these objects that then travel around the art and crafts worlds. Because they produce the objects, they come across as the starting point

[54] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*, 58-112.
[55] Lyons, Tryna. *The Artists of Nathadwara: The Practice of Painting in Rajasthan*. Bloomington, Ind.: Ahmedabad, India: Indiana University Press, 2004.

of enquiry and reference. Every one of these researches, Bundgaard's, Edwards', Lyons,' and mine all started from time spent with the makers, in observing their technique, understanding their iconography or cultural markers, the extent of their intervention in the final output, and their relation with the objects. With regards to Cheriyal paintings, the painters have been my primary source of information on the paintings but not the only one. As the research progressed, I agreed to the equal - if not more - necessity to consider the patron as a way through understanding the objects. In fact, both should be considered equally, one at the start of the objects' life and the other where it stops. As Kopytoff explains, the first one creates the opportunity for meaning and the latter stabilises it.[56]

Bundgaard, Edwards, but also Katheirne Hacker's research on *Wax-thread metal images of eastern India and Hacker*,[57] and Joanna Williams interrogation on pattachitras,[58] all corrected the assumption that craftsmen are devoid of artistic and innovative sense and of art historical concerns. Lyons with her study of *The Artists of Nathdwara* chose a rather different approach to the question of artists and instead of acknowledging the ambiguity of their status, preferred to prove their artistry. But is she started from the painters in order to understand their paintings, she never quite left them and became an advocate of their artistry, for which she stands aside any other I mentioned in this section, including mine.

Each of these studies is interdisciplinary and their methodological focus determines what the objects have to say. Whichever point of view one takes from the objects, its artists for Lyons, its consumers for Edwards, its institutions for Bundgaard, or its patrons for me, all attempts to talk about objects, their making and their journey. Each of them adopts one focus, therefore moving the other steps of the cycle to a secondary position. The discussion I just presented shows that the focus on patrons that I chose for this research inevitably moved aside the makers of these paintings and their buyers.

[56] Kopytoff I., "The Cultural Biographies of Things."
[57] Hacker, Katherine F. "Continuities and transformations among living sculptural traditions: Wax-thread metal images of eastern India." PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1993.
[58] Williams, Joanna. "Criticizing and Evaluating the Visual Arts in India: A Preliminary Example." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (1988): 3-28.

b. **Tradition**

In *The Seven Strands of Tradition, Variety in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies*, Dan Ben-Amos refused to see folklore under the criterion of tradition.[59] This comes from the fact that folklore's rootedness translated as tradition's authenticity and the question of one almost systematically brings the other. For Cheriyal paintings too, authenticity and rootedness mean a great deal and are often considered together, making it all the more improbable to divide their designation as folklore and tradition.

The Anthropology of Art or Visual Anthropology discipline has been prolific in producing studies on contemporary crafts and folklore across a range of issues such as the authenticity of the objects, the intervention of the market, the individuality of the craftsmen, but also the changing trends and possibilities for innovations. *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* for instance is particularly rich in examples from different region that look at different objects and different point of view on each of these objects.[60] The federating point of the collection of essays is their similar concern with the issues I mentioned above. For instance, Christopher Steiner's essay on "Authenticity, Repetition and the Aesthetics of Seriality The work of Tourist art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is particularly relevant to the case of Cheriyal paintings.[61] Talking about African masks for the market, he explains that the makers fabricate "sweat marks" as a proof of authenticity hence increase of sales. Similarly, the authenticity of Cheriyal paintings is highly marketed at the same time as flouted by the increased production.

Sandra Niessen with regards to Toba Batak from Indonesia questions authenticity in relation to innovation and decline.[62] In that sense, she had initially associated the disappearance of certain textiles as a further evidence of decline but later on realised that innovation was what allowed the tradition to continue and craftsmen to survive.[63]

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[59] Ben-Amos, Dan. "The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies." *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, no. 2/3 (1984): 97-131.
[60] Phillips, R.B., and C.B. Steiner. *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*: Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
[61] Steiner Christopher B. "Authenticity, Repetition and the Aesthetics of Seriality The work of Tourist art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Phillips, R.B., and C.B. Steiner. *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. 87-103.
[62] Niessen Sandra. "Threads of Tradition, Threads of Invention, Unraveling Toba Batak Women's Expressions of Social Change," in Phillips, R.B., and C.B. Steiner. *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. 162-177.
[63] Ibid., 175-176.

Until now, Cheriyal paintings still strive on very little innovation and on the epitomic features chosen by the handicraft market for being authentic therefore sustaining the tradition. Innovation nevertheless sprouts in the context of private patrons which I present in Chapter 7. This does not only concern the painters' capabilities but also the patrons' responsiveness. This co-existence of both may accelerate however the disappearance of the authentic tradition. The lack of innovation may be seen as contributing to the fading of the tradition because of its incapacity to adapt to its contemporaneity. In addition, excessive innovation would alter the authenticity of the tradition to the extent of becoming another one that Niessen considers as part of the natural life cycle of the tradition, and to which I agree.[64]

c. **Disciplinary concerns**

Researching on Cheriyal paintings means looking at scrolls and their performances, at paintings and handicraft, and at art and museum. The paintings originated in the context of performance or as the material culture of particular communities in Telangana. As they entered the handicrafts and museum institutions, they acquired new meanings that could only be apprehended through these institutions. Finally, their innovation could only be understood from a previously established context.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the research, the support of literature was dispatched across various disciplines and regions, and finding a steady disciplinary ground for the study was at the same time difficult and redundant. The research I propose is that of Cheriyal painting in its context, questioning the motivations of painters and patrons in creating and commissioning a painting, the social and political implications of these productions, and how it speaks for the spaces it visits. My observations started from the painting materiality and from the pictorial features to unravel contextual details, using a range of art historical and sociological methods.

[64] Ibid.

4. Fieldwork methodology

Before I embarked in fieldwork, I wrongly assumed that this painting practice was dying and in need of documentation. The assumption probably came from the fact that I was only aware of the scrolls for performances, which are indeed decreasing, but also from the romantic assumption that crafts need support to face modernisation. When I first met with Vaikuntam too, in December 2012, I was led to believe that the tradition was not doing well and that only one family of painters (Vaikuntam and his sons) were left to perpetuate the art.

My grand surprise was to discover a very dynamic tradition of painting and the sustainability of the overall painting practise. From my first visit to Hyderabad and Cheriyal, I understood that Cheriyal painting was more than scrolls for performances and that painters were spending a large amount of time painting for museums, private patrons and the handicraft market. Painters would reflect on the notions of artistic merit, reward and individuality, although almost always in relation to its financial implications. The discourse on disappearance was based on of the decrease of the sole performance tradition, which was in fact attracting the attention of altruistic customers and increasing sales on the market, eventually leading to the painters' social uplifting. The amount of craftsmen involved in the making of these paintings, as well as the extent to which museums and private patrons are involved in their promotion was also significant. If this might have been rather obvious to researchers on Indian crafts, it was not to me. In response to my own misevaluation, the marketing of these paintings that conveniently focuses on its rarefication rather than its dynamism, and the too little considerations given to the dynamism of the tradition became the tasks I was assigned.

a. Fieldwork setting

As the research relied heavily on primary material, that is mostly paintings, I spent a large amount of time on fieldwork, collecting images of contemporary Cheriyal paintings but also speaking to a wide range of people in order to understand the tenets and extent of the painting practice. Because I did not know exactly what I would find or rather what to search for, fieldwork initially proceeded in a rather chaotic manner, without any strict methodology apart from the vague ideal of applying field research to

art historical concerns. What I knew however was that the research was qualitative and would combine the collection of visual material with document analysis, interviews, participation and observation, and reflectivity. This approached was adopted across the various environments and with the people I interacted with, i. e. painters, patrons, museum curators and the handicraft sector's officials.

I visited Hyderabad and Cheriyal for the first time in December 2012 during a short trip I took over the Winter break. I came back to Hyderabad for a few weeks in October 2013 and then embarked on an eight month period of fieldwork from January to September 2014. This was the longest period I spent in India. I found accommodation in Hyderabad and started spending two to three afternoons a week with the painters that worked from there, taking occasional day trips to Cheriyal and longer travel period to visit museum that had the paintings in their collection across the country. Later in January 2015, I went back and spent another five months in India but in Delhi this time from where I worked on private commissions and continued my visits to museums. I visited Hyderabad several times then too, completing what I could not do earlier and following up on new commissions.

b. **Visual material**

One of the first objectives of this research was to provide scholarship on Indian painting with a substantial amount of original visual material about Cheriyal paintings. As I designed the research, I was determined to build a catalogue of painting for the two categories of scroll for performances and for museums 'collections.

One of the earliest meetings I had in Hyderabad was with a collector who was rather protective of his collection of scrolls for performances and I rapidly understood that gathering images would be prove difficult. Apart from that, I attempted several times across discussion with painters, scholars and university faculties, to enquire about performers and about ways to meet them and possibly acquire images of each narratives still performed in Telangana. This again proved unreasonable and far too ambitious; I could not attend a performance. By the end of my first visit to Hyderabad and Cheriyal, I had already given up the cataloguing of scrolls for performances.

Soon after, from my third visit onward, I began searching for the paintings that were collected or commissioned for museums so that these may be catalogued too. At first, I started noting down information on museum paintings given by the painters and then followed up by visiting these places and gathering images and details about them. This worked to a certain extent but in order to present an exhaustive catalogue of these paintings, I needed more detailed information. I asked the painters if they kept records or notes of each commission they had completed for museums; their answer was negative. The combination of the painters' - not always corroborating - memories and the too few newspapers' cuts I could gather from them could not fulfil the task and I finally cancelled the cataloguing altogether.

The large amount of photographs I frenetically collected, mostly of paintings, but museums and exhibition spaces too, brochures, handicrafts stores, situations, techniques, and more rarely people, then became a large archive of the Nakashi's activities from the 1980s to the present day, from which I selected the material relevant to my arguments. This research on the continuity and changes the Cheriyal painting tradition underwent since the inception of the handicraft institutions therefore became fully qualitative and I decided to keep the non-exhaustive catalogue for my own personal interest. This approach was then subdivided into roughly three different methodologies, informed by the materiality of the paintings and the corresponding context of their commission, production, and reception, which I shall define in the coming section.

c. **Different methodologies for different paintings**

Cheriyal paintings may be divided into three categories: the long scroll commissioned by performers for the performances of local castes Puranas, the medium size paintings commissioned by museum, government institutions and private collectors, and the small portable paintings that one finds on the handicrafts market. I soon realised that this broad division of what contemporary Cheriyal paintings were, was also going to roughly divide my methodology, the fieldwork processes and run under the chapterisation of the thesis. My role as a researcher too, was highly influenced by this correspondence between painting materiality and their context of commission, production and reception, evidently indicating very different environments to interact

with i. e. painters in their local rural context, museum institutions and handicraft related government officials, and private collectors. This is something I developed further in an article for the SOAS Postgraduate Journal as I came back from fieldwork in 2015.[65] For the purpose of this section, I shall make mention of some of its main points here as well.

From where I started, in an article of *Indian Paintings, The Lesser-known Traditions,* Cheriyal paintings were scrolls used for performances.[66] Therefore while approaching methodology, I thought of documenting the paintings but also the performances to certain extend. The section that looked at the scroll paintings for performances (Chapter 3 and 4) was difficult to shape because of the disappointment I kept accumulating while collecting the data. I first had to cancel the cataloguing project and later, I had to cancel the documentation of performances as well. Reasons were simple, yet not necessarily acceptable. I was not in touch with the right people to take me to these performances, neither was I available enough to promptly show up when they were talking place. Above all, I was not insistent enough. My foreignness might have played a role as well, in reminding the people I interacted with that my level of Telugu would make me the least capable of talking about the performance tradition. I had unfortunately too little time to insist, to correct the assumption and learn the language.

Instead, I chose to work it out differently in keeping the focus to the painting materiality and the performative dimension as one of the contextual element. I opted for an up-to-date description of the performance process, the people involved, their position with regards to the paintings and the position of these particular types of paintings within the local society. All this then became achievable through existing literature by Thangavelu and Mittal, updated when necessary with the painters themselves.

As a compensation for the inaccessibility of material on performance, I was surprised to encounter temple paintings in the region of Cheriyal, which I was not aware of. The same artists who paint Cheriyal paintings on cloth also paint on temple wall around their village. I had heard that Vaikuntam's grandfather was occasionally painting temple gates but assumed that this had ceased. The painters themselves suggested that I should have a look at it and allowed me to discover this original material. This information

[65] Da Fonseca, Anais. "Contemporary Lives of Cherial Paintings from Telangana India: Notes on the Relations between Fieldwork and Thesis Structures." in *SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, Vol. 8, (2015): 59-63.
[66] Dallapiccola, ed. *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*.

allowed me to insist on the empirical approach I was already taking with the scroll for performances and I finally decided to use both for a presentation of the material culture of certain communities of the Cheriyal region. I would then propose a close up of scroll narratives for which I could gather material and that proved supportive of my argument on the fixity and change of this tradition.

Most of my data for the three first chapters was collected through contact with the painters and through Thangavelu's thesis that focused on the scrolls. Working with folk paintings entailed close collaboration with the local communities that relate to the practice. Questions about the materiality and style of the painting often sounded surprising and unnecessary to the painters; as would my interest in meeting storytellers. In contrast, questions on the technique and religious dimension of the paintings drew enthusiastic responses. I spent a total of thirteen months in the field and spread my work with the painters evenly throughout, maintaining regular interactions. In the course of my fieldwork and in spite of not conducting an ethnography *per se*, I soon realised the need to try being in the painters' shoes, which changed my way of looking at paintings, and my subsequent understanding of how painters themselves saw their own production.

In the second field of enquiry, I looked at the paintings that were commissioned to represent Cheriyal paintings within an institutionalised environment, that of museums and cultural organisations, and the market (Chapter 5 and 6). The research process was different here. I had to collect a large amount of material in order to draw generalities and make my argumentative cases, relying less on people's narratives. This section was the most difficult for this reason. Unlike the section on paintings for the local communities, I did not adopt an empirical method to answer descriptive questions. Instead, I needed to collect a lot of information in order to interpret the overall results and build hypotheses. The method of collection was empirical and the method of analysis was deductive, combining the truth of the material collected with my own existing theoretical framework.

The second difficulty of this section was in finding a scope for it and until now, I am not exactly sure I have made the right choice. This uncertainty arose from the definition I had in mind of institutions and of the people who commissioned these paintings, but also on the nature of the paintings themselves. I opted for a gathering of material under

the process of institutionalisation rather than an understanding of institutions as patrons. I kept together the paintings that were both dedicated to museums and the handicraft market, therefore approaching museology and visual culture as part of the process of institutionalisation of these paintings. Each of these sections is discussed on the basis of several case studies but gathered together under the one argument on institutionalisation.

The third part of the research (Chapter 7) illustrates the argumentative approach of the previous section through several case studies, four exactly, of particular paintings commissioned for particular purposes. For that, I had to gather visual material and information on the paintings and on their context of commission. Collecting data here was done in two steps. In the first one, I gathered visual material and in the second, I went back to the patrons of these commissions with hypotheses to clear. This section is interpretative but sustained by visual material.

Selecting the material, case studies and images to include in this thesis depended majorly on the information I had gathered about them and on the argument of each chapter.

d. **Encounters and interviews**

Interactions with painters, patrons, museum curators and keepers, and handicraft sector's officials were usually prepared beforehand; and for the first few, I had designed semi-structured interviews, especially with painters and some of the patrons. The method however showed limitations and most of the subsequent meeting became more informal. Some encounters took place without notice or prior appointments, which demanded instantaneous response with a new line of questions. For instance, one of the Cheriyal painters named Madhu, whom I shall discus further in the thesis, was called to Veerender Mallam's office at the Salar Jung Museum as I was there for the first time discussing my research interest with the museum keeper. Veerender deemed useful for me to meet the painter as soon as possible, leaving no time for me to prepare specific questions. Apart from these spontaneous instances, most interesting information also often came out of casual conversation sprouting impromptu as I would be sitting in the painters' home simply observing, or as I visited a museum only to get an image but was

lucky enough to find someone talkative. This too, demanded readiness to think methodically and great flexibility in formulating questions.

e. **Interviews with the painters**

My first encounter with the Cheriyal painters was with Vaikuntam, with the help of the Salar Jung Museum deputy keeper Veerender Mallam. I visited Cheriyal for the first time in December 2012. When I started my longer period of fieldwork in January 2014, Vaikuntam's family had moved to Hyderabad which was easier for me to work with them. Later in May 2014, I met Sai Kiran for the first time at a workshop on Cheriyal paintings I attended in Hyderabad. When I later visited Sai Kiran's father Nageshwar in Cheriyal in June the same year, I met with all the other painters and assistants. In addition to these families, I was fortunate to meet through the Salar Jung Museum again another painter named Madhu Merugoju. Madhu does not belong to the Nakash family and is usually not acknowledged by his fellow painters. All the other painters belong to the Nakash family of Nakashi (caste).

With the painters, I initially prepared semi-structured interviews, which I could never quite conduct for various reasons. My questions were not understood or answered and I chose instead to observe for some time without questioning. Once I was settled and more comfortable, I decided to conduct unstructured interviews where I only noted down beforehand broad questions and fields of enquiry for myself to touch upon and let the conversation take any direction from there. This method proved productive and much more comfortable for all of us with the advantages of a) not pressurise them to 'perform' in a certain way as they were interviewed and b) give space to "things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting."[67]

While every painter had some basic understanding of English, having them to discuss their work in this language proved difficult. There would always be however someone within the family who could speak English fluently and mediate the conversation. It was rarely the elder painters themselves but their children (Vaikuntam's sons Rakesh and Vinay, and Nageshwar's son Sai Kiran) and wives (Madhu's wife Aruna). On the basis of their fluency in English, Rakesh, Sai Kiran, and Aruna became my key informants.

[67] Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001, 263.

Vaikuntam's younger son Vinay and Nageshwar's son Sai Kiran were the only two painters whom I could speak directly and entirely in English, without anyone's interventions.

At one occasion with Vaikuntam, I prepared a semi-structured interview in Hindi, for which my level was far better than Telugu and largely spoken among the Nakashis. This proved too challenging as well and the language exercise took over the art historical enquiry. I then reversed back to the mediation technique, and most of my conversation became entirely informal, in between English and Hindi with the elder men painters of the family and their sons, and with Madhu and his wife Aruna. The shift from English to Hindi at times proved very useful due to the incapacity to translate certain words, especially those related to vernacular material, techniques and concepts such as *gurukula* for instance. Thankfully too, translation or interpretation was limited to a family member translating very specific information which another family member himself would not be able to express in either English or Hindi. Conversations with museum curators, handicraft officials and collectors were systematically conducted in English.

f. **Notes on interpretation**

Because my interactions and conversation about Cheriyal painting almost entirely took place in India, with Indian men who largely occupy the field of arts and crafts, and particularly with people from Hyderabad and Telangana, the cultural background of my informants was clearly different than mine. In this regards, an interesting passage from Frow and Morris about cross-cultural research and particularly with regards to interviewing states: "for many scholars now, questions of identity and community are framed not only by issues of race, class, and gender but by the deeply political concern with place, cultural memory, and the variable terms of the scholars' access to an "international" space of debate dominated not only by Western preoccupations but by the English language." Keeping in mind that English was not my mother-tongue more than it was that of the painters, I had to formulate and re-formulate questions many a times in a way that they would make sense to the cultural setting in which I was located inasmuch as they would serve the lines of enquiry I had formulated with my own understanding of the situation.

As Rubin and Rubin have noted too about fieldwork: "You don't have to be a woman to interview women, or a sumo wrestler to interview sumo wrestlers. But if you are going to cross social gaps and go where you are ignorant, […] you have to accept that how you are seen by the person being interviewed will affect what is said."[68] If museum curators could easily understand the scholarly interest for Cheriyal paintings, painters would rather perceive my presence as a potential client or at least a source for further network of foreign clients. If this was true for the painter's perception of my presence, it is also true for the ways in which I would formulate my questions, on the basis of my preliminary perception of them and their work, often assuming for instance that craftsmen would know only little of Indian history of paintings, which clearly was not the case.

Some of these complexities and misunderstandings however, were overtaken as I paid recurrent visits to the same people over three years. By the time I moved to Hyderabad and began fieldwork in January 2014, I was already acquainted with some painters and museum curators, but also familiar with modes of transportation and social etiquette, especially hierarchies of gender and age which play a major role in the Indian context. These regular visits over a long period of time vouched for my genuine and sustained interest; and everyone became more talkative and comfortable in spite of the cultural differences.

For what concerns the content of my questions more specifically, at times, I had to reconsider my ways of thinking and disregard or alter some of the questions which could not find meaning in the painters' setting. For instance as I enquired about the choice of colours for the characters in painting, I formulated a question that contained the word "preferences," to which I was answered that "the body colour is fixed […] and then according to the body colour we have fixed possibilities for the clothes, pink goes with red and yellow for example."[69] In addition, there was at times a topic that may be often discussed within scholarship such as caste, which was rather sensible once back in its original setting.[70]Asking people directly about their caste proved difficult whereas discussing another community's caste was surprisingly easy and often brought up by the

[68] Ibid., 39.
[69] 17/02/2014 Discussion with Vinay Nakash.
[70] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods,* 393.

informants themselves. At times too, I chose to re-ask, identically or in different ways the same questions several times at different moments and to different people in order to testify information.

The last note to make on interpretation concerns the research question as a whole and more specifically the typological division I chose to adopt for the study of these paintings. Mostly based on material features and on the function of the paintings within their context of reception, the painters showed a different way to classify them, based on their financial value. The typologies created by the researcher (here me) followed that of the painting's reception and prioritises patrons rather than the painters, even if there exist correspondence between the two. In addition, while the art historian may divide paintings by their skilfulness, finesse or any other aesthetic criteria, itself highly subjective, painters divide their commissions on the basis of practicalities. For instance, Nageshwar and his brothers who live in Cheriyal will usually take care of any commission that takes place there such as the local temples, while Vaikuntam in Hyderabad will answer private patron's commissions. The younger painters in contrast would be assigned workshops, work where longer travel or the use of English is required, and any commission with less conventional artistic demands such as murals or collaborative work.

g. **Reporting the findings**

As much as possible, interpretation of the research findings takes into account the above mentioned issues around fieldwork and especially with regards to the interpretation of a different cultural setting and of one of its material manifestations that is painting. For reporting this in the thesis however, and largely due to the fact that note taking of conversation and informal interviews took the form of key word and short sentences rather than fully recorded and transcribed interviews, I could not use strict quotation or report these conversations in detail. The research not being ethnographic in its tenets, I was satisfied with the option.

For this reason however, I took the liberty to paraphrase, avoiding over interpretation to the best of my capacity and trying to integrate nuances over interpretation to my written accounts. I trust the long-term immersion within the context of the study to have helped

acknowledging these nuances and reporting this in a way that indeed would make sense to my own cultural setting and that of the painters conjunctly.[71]

5. **Material review**

When I started this research on Cheriyal paintings, I was only aware of a few scroll paintings for performances of the local castes Puranas found in the literature and a few small paintings of Rama and Krishna's lives sold on the handicraft market and encountered during tourist trips to India. Fieldwork turned out to be surprising and I found it important to review the material I collected and decided to include in the thesis. Not everything can be reviewed individually and I chose to review the material by typology of the paintings and to concentrate only on those that I decided to use in the thesis. I understood typology as general categories based on similarities in format, support, style, iconography and function. The process proved useful in sustaining my thesis and in dividing these painting by their environment of reception. I will therefore present these typologies and explain how each of them allows offering a comprehensive aspect of the paintings only to be part of the whole name Cheriyal.

The paintings used for performances range from 915 to 1365 cm in length, and about 76 to 115 cm in width,[72] divided into registers whether horizontal or vertical, and they develop narratives across several visual devices. Figures are mostly depicted in profile view and circled with a black line. Each register has a decorated border that also divides the whole painting into sections. These scrolls are used during the performance of the local caste genealogies in front of the local patrons and village audience.

Most of the material on the scrolls is gathered together in book chapters and articles written by Mittal and in the collections of Mittal, the Salar Jung museum in Hyderabad, the British Museum in London, the Calico Museum of Textiles in Ahmedabad and the Crafts Museum in Delhi. All hold scrolls initially painted for performances and collected for the museum display. Mittal refers to these scrolls as 'Deccani' while other museums will identify them from their provenance, i. e. Andhra Pradesh or Telangana.

[71] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 391.
[72] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*, 9.

In contrast to the old scrolls collected for museum display, I came across three scrolls that were painted as for a performance but commissioned for displaying in museums. The Indira Gandhi Manav Rashtriya Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) in Bhopal, DakshinaChitra Chennai and the Telugu University, all commissioned scrolls for performance that never were in use. All share their interest in documenting the local folklore to the best of the contemporary knowledge. The IGRMS commissioned a Markandeya Purana while DakshinaChitra and the Telugu University both commissioned a set of wooden figurine and scrolls of the Katam Raju Katha. Chapter 6 and 7 look at these museums and their Cheriyal painting in greater detail while Chapter 4 deals with the specificities of the Katam Raju Katha narrative and its various possibilities of its material support.

Another important feature of Cheriyal paintings as scroll is the predominance of two narratives among private and museum collections: the Markandeya Purana and the Madel Purana. The Markandeya Purana narrates the weavers community while the Madel Purana that of the washermen. There are greater numbers of these two scrolls collected and documented than any other narratives. The comparative wealth of the Padmasali community may be one explanation. Having left the village and shifted activities, the Padmasali probably lost interest and the necessity to commission performances, leaving performers to sell the scrolls. It is important to note here that Rakesh Nakash mentioned in one of our discussion that "weavers [Padmasali] and barbers have never commissioned to us." [73] Knowing that his father Vaikuntam has been active for around fourty years, the decline in commission of the Markandeya Purana has been notable for a similar period.

In addition, when I asked Nageshwar which scrolls he had painted in his life, he answered "Mahabharata we painted the most. Madel Purana too."[74] During my time on fieldwork, there had been commissions for three scrolls of the Mahabharata, one of the Jambavanta Purana and one of the Katam Raju Katha. Clearly for Nageshwar, the Mahabharata is a popular commission until today. There would be however no right way to understand the fluctuation and variations in scroll commissions without spending time on documenting their performances as well. Whatever the reasons are, it is clear that performers work regularly with the same family of painters and documenting the

[73] 27/02/2014 Anais: "In your career which caste commissioned you the most?" Rakesh after asking his father in Telugu: "Weavers and barbers have never commissioned to us. Barbers there are no performers at all any more."
[74] 11/05/2014 Discussion with Sai Kiran and his parents Nageshwar and Padma.

variation in scroll commission with regards to the performance from the painters' experiences and knowledge would be inaccurate. Information on the performance practice can still be found among the performers' communities themselves and in the vernacular language Telugu in few dissertations conducted on the subject. Further work among performers was unfortunately not within the scope of this thesis.

As part of the material found on performance tradition and museum collection, I encountered the display of wooden figurines that the painters call dolls. Similar in colours, forms and style to the scroll cloth painting, the painted dolls are also considered as Cheriyal paintings. At first hesitant towards their inclusion in the thesis, I realised that these are intimately linked to the paintings both for the performance tradition and in the contemporary handicraft market. Yet these dolls are rather left out of institutional commission who would opt for paintings on cloth as a representative of the practice. Private commissions too tend to choose paintings on cloths over the dolls. The most important set of figurines I have found had been commissioned by DakshinaChitra Chennai to present the Katam Raju Katha story, which I introduced earlier in my review.

Alongside the painted scrolls and dolls for performances of the *kulapuranas* (caste Puranas), I was able to collect images of temple walls around Cheriyal painted by the same Nakashi craftsmen. Together, these three different supports were to become the material culture of the rural Telangana communities, which I gathered in Chapter 3 and 4. While temple painting has always been common practice in Telangana and South India, it had not been associated with the Cheriyal painting style before. The local Nakashi family regularly paints eight temples around Cheriyal. Paintings beyond this area are found too, which highlights the presence of other painters in neighbouring districts. These painters are not necessarily from the same caste and community and may be different craftsmen altogether, carpenters for instance, being hired for other side activities when needed. Another significant feature of these temples is that they are dedicated to local goddesses generally worshipped by low caste's communities that at times coincide with those who commission performances as well. Cheriyal craftsmen themselves worship local goddesses among major deities but they do not paint temples for the latter.

Another category of paintings I was able to find was the small painting on cloth. They may be seen as part of the Pata painting family, on the handcraft market where they are found. Cheriyal Pata paintings are mostly available in the Andhra Pradesh state Emporium Lepakshi. They are small paintings on cloth and generally represent a smaller version of the old scrolls. They are advertised as authentic craft. Clean copies of antique scrolls documented in books are sometimes found as well. The background is red and the paintings mostly depict single narrative scenes, at times two or three registers. Subjects are taken from pan-Indian mythological stories such as the Ramayana or the Krishna Lila. The major concern here is to maintain 'cherialness' through the red background, the black line, the profile figures and the mythological subject, regardless of the quick rendering. All sorts of other objects also take part in this Cheriyal visual culture. Key chains, masks, wedding cards, and saree paintings carry Cheriyal authentic traits and form the Cheriyal idiom. The production remains handmade in spite of being produced in big numbers by assistants rather than the masters themselves.

I discovered a large amount of other formats, other subjects, and other functions to these paintings. Some of them are exhibited within museums, some of them within other government or private institutions, at homes, or simply remains experimentations by the painters. This third category of painting can be grouped together by their tailored aspect. Retaining a medium size format, they could be various in colours, in iconography, and mostly represent the most innovative hand of the Cheriyal painters. Elements of 'cherialness' are not necessarily evident in these.
Within institutions, paintings seem to follow conventions drawn from a 'universal' history of art. While experimenting with 'contemporary art,' the painters tend to reduce and balance the format of their painting to a square canvas that depicts single scene subject with a large amount of tint areas and empty spaces, generally not the case in the traditional scrolls. Paintings submitted for State and National awards follow a different style and painters then opt for a miniature rendering of pan-Indian Vaishnavite subjects, Ramayana and Krishna-Lila. The politics behind these choices are explored further in the final chapter (Chapter 7).

Most innovations with the Cheriyal idiom can be found in private commissions. The plural nature and private consumption of these pieces made it the material the most difficult to collect. Subjects mostly are hybrids. For instance, a scholar of Tamil folklore

commissioned a Cheriyal style set of motifs for an online Tamil Tale. A Shrinathji worshipper commissioned an image of Krishna as a testimony of his own hybrid community. These are presented in Chapter 7 as well.

Overall, the material collected on Cheriyal painting is as various as the patrons are. I could not be exhaustive in reviewing it and found it more pertinent to point out specificities but also to draw generalities on this material. To summarize, one can find three ranges of formats: the long scroll based on those for performances, the medium and tailored one, which means anything between the performance scroll and the small handicraft market paintings and finally the small format, easily carrieable and sold on the market. The cloth support remains the same for all, with variation on the amount of coating applied depending on the price and the use. In terms of techniques, painters would be using chemical watercolour unless the commission stipulates and funds otherwise. Finally, the iconography encompasses the localised castes narratives, pan-Indian mythological subjects, and recently secular subjects such as village sceneries. The wide range of paintings, support, subjects and functions which defines Cheriyal style can however be gathered together under the predominance of red, the black line around figures in profile with deep black eyes.

6. Chapter outline

In reference to material culture in the context of anthropology and ethnography, *The Encyclopaedia of Asian Folklore*[75] talks about a recent shift from "the study of objects themselves to a study of what those objects mean and how their production or reproduction reflect social, economic and ideological aspects of a society."[76] This is an apt definition of what I intent to develop in this research on Cheriyal paintings.

The thesis is divided into six chapters, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction (Chapter 1), proposed to set the ground of the research through the literature, emphasising the importance of the relation between secondary sources and the first three chapters as both relate to the oldest known function of the paintings which

[75] Claus, P.J., D. Sarah, and M.A. Mills. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia : Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2003, 391.
[76] Ibid.

is the scroll for performances. The presentation of the theoretical framework of the research that follows naturally concentrated on the argument I develop in the core chapters on institutions. The critique is selective and theoretical elements will be added to each chapter as well. In the introduction too, I proposed a fieldwork methodology as well as a reflection on the connection between this methodology, the findings and the structure of the thesis. Finally I introduced the making technique of Cheriyal paintings on cloth and on wood.

Chapter 2 approaches the difficult question of Cheriyal paintings' origin and history. Because the research was not based on the past of the painting tradition but on its transition to the present and on its becoming, I do not give an answer to the matter of history. Instead, the chapter offers several alternatives to consider based on the resilience of folk practices. With the support of Dallapiccola's work on South Indian paintings, I aim to compare Cheriyal painting to the south Indian temple narrative paintings. I also propose to compare the paintings to other folk art forms from the region and from further west in India, with a special attention on the triggering comparison with the Rajasthani *phad* and *kavad* paintings. This is done conjunctly rather than chronologically in order to dress a portrait of the artistic development around the Cheriyal painting tradition.

I transit the historical chapter to the beginning of my thesis by a presentation of the Cheriyal painters, their location and interactions with one another. Chapter 3 focuses on Cheriyal paintings for the local communities of Telangana. I included under the purview of this chapter the paintings on temple walls as well as the temple *murtis*, and the scrolls and figurines for performances. Based on a critical update of Mittal and Thangvelu's findings, this chapter argues that Cheriyal painting constitutes an identity marker of the region and plays an important federating role for the communities that interact with them, through commission, production or reception. This is made possible through the consideration of the protagonists that interact with the painting equally, therefore seeing painting as material culture of the region.

Chapter 4 illustrate the previous chapter's argument in offering two case studies of these paintings for the local communities and questions how their material and pictorial features may be indicative of their function. The scroll paintings of the Padmasali Purana painted for the Padmasali constitutes the first case where I explore the continuity

of the tradition over time and the responsibility of the patrons in this regards. In the second case study, I look at the Katam Raju Katha narrative to nuance the fixity observed in the first case and introduce the possibility of innovation. Both fixity and innovation I argue, depend on the genealogical function of the scroll and its performance which I believe insists on the fundamental role of paintings within the local communities.

Chapter 5 constitutes the first section of the core of my argument on the role of institutions in shaping contemporary Cheriyal painting. This chapter focuses more particularly on the intervention of the handicraft sector, first from the Indian government, then relegated by its market. Across several interventions into the financial and aesthetic aspects of the tradition, I argue that the institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting as craft led to the construction of epitomised features and discourse that serve a homogenised Indian nation.

Following this, Chapter 6 continues with the role of institutions, turning this time to museums. Here, I look at conventional and universal museums in contrast with what I called the 'Indian crafts museums', which I locate within Apadurai and Brenckenridge's definition of public culture. I question these museums' role in shaping the discourse on Cheriyal painting but also in comparison with what the handicraft market did. I argue that both approached the painting from a different angle but functioned together in increasing both artistic and commoditised value to the objects, often exchanging roles. These two chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) function together not only for the increased possibilities of movements they provide to the paintings but also to highlight what the paintings have to reveal about these institutions, therefore making the institution as important - if not more - as the paintings.

Chapter 7 takes a step back from the paintings' environment to come back to their materiality and function as an illustration of the previous two chapters on the institutionalisation. Across four case studies, I bring about commissions for an educational institution, a museum, a private collector and a scholar. Each case offers circumstances of commission for which institutions presented above have played a role; each offer various painting materiality and style and all of them are closely related to their patron's politics. This chapter observes the exceeding possibilities of Cheriyal

paintings and the responsibility of the protagonists that interact with the tradition in defining these limits.

In conclusion, which constitutes Chapter 8, I propose to make my case on the continuity and changes in the Cheriyal painting tradition, with regards to its contemporaneity and always in relation to the different entities that interact with them. I also propose to discuss the resilience of the tradition, and to open on the limits of the tradition if there can be any.

Chapter II

Historical and artistic context

1. Cheriyal

Cheriyal paintings, as their name indicates, are produced in the village of Cheriyal, in the Warangal district, in the state of Telangana, in South India (Fig. 2. 1). Each of these geographical markers brings their own historical and artistic particularities and conventions to take into consideration in the study of the local art forms.

In the present day, Telangana shares borders with Maharashtra in the west, and Karnataka in the south-west, as well as Andhra Pradesh in the south. Chhattisgarh and Orissa share its northern and eastern borders. As it was earlier included into Andhra Pradesh and share the same language Telugu, Telangana maintained a close link to the South Indian Dravidian cultural capital. Now independent since June 2014, the state stands in between the west-eastern belt of the country and between the north and the south. The Deccan region is particularly rich in cultural exchanges for this reason which is important to take into consideration.

After India became an independent nation in 1947, the State Reorganisation Commission rearranged Indian states into linguistic units. In 1956, Andhra Pradesh was founded on the basis of a shared language, Telugu. The newly formed state of Andhra Pradesh combined the Telugu speaking population of the previous Hyderabad State and the Madras Presidency. Before the formation of Andhra Pradesh, the Nizams of Hyderabad had been ruling most of Telangana from 1724, until India finally annexed the state into the Union in 1948. For a short period before that, between 1687 and 1724, the Mughals occupied the region. Prior to the Mughals, Telangana was part of the Sultanate of Golconda that itself, was formed at the fall of the Bahmani Sultanate that ruled the Deccan from 1347 to 1527. Finally, before the occupation of the Deccan by the Sultanates, Telangana was ruled for a brief period by the Musunuri Nayak, warrior chieftains of the Kakatyas. The Kakatya dynasty ruled over Telangana and most parts of

Andhra Pradesh from 1083 to 1323. Their capital was Warangal, around one hundred kilometres from Cheriyal.

In June 2014, while I was on fieldwork, Telangana became an independent state of the Union of India, cut from what was previously Andhra Pradesh. The circumstances that led to the formation of Telangana as a state of India is not what concerns this thesis but its recent formation questions the validity of political and diplomatic division in the research on regional art forms. Every research is affiliated to the states or dynasties that they had under purview, as key chronological markers but also as important context of patronage. For the case of Cheriyal paintings, they are now located in Telangana and it would be false information to associate them to Andhra Pradesh. Their discovery and institutionalisation however took place within Andhra Pradesh and continues in the present-day Telangana. As for a potential origin of the paintings on the basis of the oldest scroll available dated 1625, it sends us back to the Sultanate of Golconda, far before Andhra Pradesh was understood as a cultural zone. While researching any historical dimension of art or artifacts from Telangana, it is necessary to consider the region pre-independence of the state and pre-Independence of India but also before the arrival of the Mughals and before them the Sultanates.

Performances with the use of visual props such as scrolls, *kavad* (box), or cardboard, are known to several regions of India such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal for instance. This covers the west-east belt of the country, across Telangana and Cheriyal. Apart from these, painted narratives on cloth are found in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with the kalamkari, along with the lengthy narrative on temple walls and ceiling in the Southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, therefore bridging Telangana with the far South of the country.

Across this short presentation, I tried to draw the attention on the shortcomings of considering Telangana as an independent geographical, historical, and cultural unit. Much is to be taken into consideration as one explores the local folk traditions such as Cheriyal paintings, especially while thinking about its history.

2. An alternative history of Cheriyal paintings

As with many folk traditions, the lack of written records, the meagre textual indications, and the sporadic collection of objects make it difficult to trace the history of Cheriyal paintings. The oldest painting that survived is a scroll initially used for performance, now in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian art in Hyderabad (acc. no. 76.469) (Fig. 2. 2). The painting has been dated 1625 from an inscription at the back. It was painted for the Kunapulis who perform for the Padmasalis. The inscription attests of the scroll having been sold to another performer in 1644.[1] Assuming the scroll had been painted earlier than the date it changed hands, Mittal proposed 1625, which seems reasonable to agree on stylistic grounds as well and which I shall talk about in a moment. The inscription also bears the name of the place where the exchange took place, Mojagidda, a village in the Mahboobnagar district in Southern Telangana.

Because the scroll painting is the oldest evidence of the Cheriyal painting tradition as a whole, its function in the context of performance is our reference point to explore the history of the tradition. This has several implications on the directions to take in search of its history. On the basis of this function, one could approach the history of Cheriyal paintings through that of the performance of castes genealogies. If we consider the scroll as a visual record of the genealogies they depict, another avenue could be to look at the tradition of recording genealogies like it is the case in Gujarat and Rajasthan for instance.[2] Finally, one could isolate the painting from its performative dimension and search for stylistic similarities in neighbouring visual developments.

Unfortunately, I could not pursue the avenue of performance and genealogies further as it would imply knowledge of the local language, a thorough fieldwork among performers rather than painters and a focus on the narrative rather than its visual rendering. Instead, I opt for a presentation of the painting traditions that share material, pictorial, stylistic of functional features with the Cheriyal scrolls. The performance and

[1] "Tarana (year), Kartik (month) (Tuesday), Village: Mojagidda, in Koduru paragana, Mahboobnagar district. Donors (1) Venkanna, (2) Nawit Vira, son of Tadula Rammana and Tirupatamma. Donee: Bhagwandas (narrator) Price: Rs. 8/- (Rupees eight) Witnesses: (1) Chuppala Sayanna, (2) Siddam Gangapuri, (3) Panaganti Mallesh, (4) Tamma Yelisetti, (5) Yamugula Sayanna." in, Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art,* 25.

[2] Das, Veena. *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*. Delhi ; Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1977. and Shah A. M. and Schroff R. G. "The Vahivanca Barot of Gujarat: A caste of genealogists and mythographers", in Singer, Milton. *Traditional India: Structure and Change*. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959. 40-70

genealogical dimensions will therefore be approached but in the context of similarities in the use of these objects. I do not have the ambition to formulate one hypothesis on the possible origin and history of the Cheriyal painting. Instead, I propose to survey the possible connections between different visual art forms, and propose an alternative history through the tradition's potential trajectories.

In the case of visual folklore, there is a tendency to compare the style of the given material to similar paintings on different medium and to start from examples usually within 'classical' traditions that are documented in greater detail. If we follow this method with regards to the 1625 scroll, it implies looking at Deccani paintings from the Sultanate courts of the present day Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka, that flourished from the sixteenth century onwards. What also come to mind are the sixteenth century Vijayanagara paintings in temple for which there are only few surviving examples at Lepakshi in southern Andhra Pradesh. Successors of the Vijayanagara kingdoms known as the Nayaka have been patrons of paintings in temples up to the nineteenth century in the Southern part of the Deccan as far as Tamil Nadu, and propose an interesting comparison as well.

Yet, there are several other visual art traditions that may be included within the geographical and chronological framework in which one historicises the Telangana scrolls. These are usually considered as 'folk.' For reasons I have explained in the literature review, there is not serious research on these lesser-known art forms prior to the 1980s, apart perhaps for what concerns Bengali folklore.[3] Thanks to the efforts of most recent scholarship however, it is now possible to initiate connections these with alternative visual developments. In relation to the Telangana scroll tradition, most relevant folk art forms to take into consideration would be the kalamkari hangings from Andhra Pradesh, but also the leather puppet play from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the Paithan paintings from Maharashtra, and finally the Phad paintings from Rajasthan.

[3] Chapter 1, page 15-6 of this dissertation

3. The 1625 scroll and 'classical' paintings

a. The sixteenth century Lepakshi paintings

Most of Mittal's tentative history of the scroll tradition is based on the 1625 scroll which he usually associates to the ceiling of the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi, the most – and only – representative of paintings of the Vijayanagara period (1336-1565).[4] The ceiling at Lepakshi is most probably contemporary to the temple building i. e. c. 1530.[5] Mittal's suggestion is essentially based and on the fluid line so characteristic of both the 1625 scroll and the paintings at Lepakshi.[6] Even though his proposition is rather acceptable, he does not however take the comparison further which I would like to propose briefly.

More than striking stylistic similarities between the scroll and the Lepakshi paintings, it is in the use of some pictorial principles that both find connections. The first one is the flowing black line that circles figures and underlines their round shapes. This thin and subtle line is a common feature of both paintings and something that continues in the scroll tradition until now. In fact, this is one of the most important characteristics of the Cheriyal painting tradition, and something painters, as well as scholars who researched on the painting, have acknowledged. For instance, as Thangavelu discussed with the Nakashi painters (Vaikuntam and Chandraiah) about their intervention in the painting, what they came to mention first was the line:

> "The character of the black writing is what one looks at when one evaluates the work of a Nakasi. Actually, we are called Nakasis because the work we used to do earlier was called Naskh-pani. [*Naskh* is a classic Arabic script; *pani* is the term in Telugu for work. So *naskh-pani* is script-work]. A painting is only as good as the quelaity of the black writing. If the writing is strong, or fine and delicate (*baarikh*) then is a good painting" [7]

[4] Almost each of Mittal's writing makes reference to the Lepakshi paintings. The most developed is in Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 2014, 17.
[5] Dallapiccola, Anna L. "Chapter 22 Vijayanagara and Nayaka Paintings" in Dallapiccola, Anna L. and Verghese A., and *South India Under Vijayanagara: Art and Archaeology*. Oxford University Press India, 2011, 273.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India*, 22.

This passage also indicates that *naskh*, Arabic for 'script,' is what owed the painters their name Nakashi. [8] This connection between the work of the 'line,' *naqsh* in Urdu, is also discussed in Rahul Jain's *Rapture: The Art of India Textile*s as he describes intricate pattern-wevaning in Varanasi silk and mentions about the pattern-makers known as *naqshband*, who "designed and prepared the pattern modules, or *naqsha*, for drawlooms weavers."[9] Vaikuntam once mentioned that the Nakashis were initially known as Chitrakar and that they changed their caste name "at the time of the Nizam,"[10] probably adopting the more prestigious Urduised name to designate an artist in fashion at the Muslim courts of the Deccan and gifted in fine line work.[11] More research on the artist at the Deccani courts would be needed here to identify the motives behind the shift from Chitrakar to Nakashi, but the connections between several region through this work of the line is particularly interesting, from southern Indian temple paintings up to the Telangana scrolls, to the extent of having become one of the characteristic features of the Cheriyal panting style.

Another feature of the Telangana scroll that one finds at Lepakshi is the narrative dimension and the division of space into registers, horizontal at Lepakshi and vertical on the 1625 scroll. The Telangana scroll may be seen in both horizontal and vertical orientations, and the registers function as single narrative units that can be transposed either way. There are no horizontal scrolls preserved from the sixteenth century but the relative fixity of the scroll tradition safely allows one to say that the organisation would have been like most recent scrolls. The horizontal scrolls are usually divided into two main rows across the entire length of the scroll and the narrative dispatched on it from right to left of the upper row, continuing from left to right of the lower. Similarly, the horizontal narratives at Lepakshi are read from one row to the other continuously, starting the next from where the previous ended. Borders play an important role in the division of scenes in the scroll and at Lepakshi, and frame the painting to its top and bottom. On the scrolls however, the use of borders is more systematic as they divide each row within the whole narrative as well, whereas at Lepakshi, the building architecture plays this role.

[8] Ibid.
[9] Jain, Rahul. Rapture: The Art of Indian Textiles. Nyogi: New Delhi, 2011, 212.
[10] 27/02/2014 Anais: "Do you know the origin of your caste? Were your ancestors all painters? Rakesh interpreting Vaikuntam: "Nakashi is from the Nizam's time, before our name was Chitrakar."
[11] Thangavelu, *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India*, 1998. 22.

The third most important element of comparison is the variety of costumes and textile patterns (Fig. 2. 3 and 2. 4). At Lepakshi, women wear sarees draped with their *pallu* (loose end of the saree) either side of the shoulder. Each saree is designed with complex textile patterns, at times with geometric motifs. The variety of textile pattern is found in the 1625 scroll as well, so are the geometric patterns. The sarees' *pallus* however are always on the left shoulder for every female character. The female figures on the scroll as in Lepakshi do not systematically wear a blouse either although I could not identify the conventions that define the use of a blouse or not. For instance in the scroll, Bhu Devi and Sri Devi that accompany Vishnu always wear a blouse whereas Bhadravati is first seen with a blouse (Fig. 2. 2 reg. 13) and later as she marries Bhavana, she no longer wears it (reg. 17). The trimurti's (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu) consorts do not wear it either (reg. 5). The male costumes in the scroll too, show great variety of textile designs and patterns (Fig. 2. 5 and 2. 6). With few exceptions, they do not usually wear a lower garment (*pajama*) under their dhoti whereas they do at Lepakshi. If Lepakshi shows a variety of head dresses and crowns as well, the scroll limits the head wear to only few designs, a crown for all deities, a turban for any other male figure, and the hair tied up together in a chignon and ornamented with white hair jewellery and flowers for each female figure.

Finally, the Lepakshi painting adopted a naturalistic depiction of fauna and flora, with impressive animals and tree designs (Fig. 2. 7 and 2. 8). In the scroll, apart from the tigers that Bhavana rishi mounts and offers to Shiva, there are only rare animals and no plants. The naturalist depiction at Lepakshi leads me to an important difference with the scroll which is the depiction of the figures' face and especially the eyes. At Lepakshi, figures are shown in three quarters with the hidden eye slightly projecting towards the front. In the scroll, the figures are homogeneously depicted in profile view, including the trimurti's. The only exceptions are Ganesha at the start of the scroll, a small demon in the second register, a *rishi* (sage) in the seventh, and Gangamma in the twentieth; all are in frontal view.

b. **The paintings at Hampi, c. 1830-40**

In *South Indian under Vijayanagara*, Dallapiccola proposes a new dating for the paintings of the ceiling of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi. The paintings have long

been dated to the sixteenth century Vijayanagara period which she convincingly relocated to c. 1830-40.[12] What I found important with regards to the Telangana scroll is that the elements of comparison that she uses to differentiate the Lepakshi from the Hampi ceiling may be applied to the 1625 scroll as well, therefore emphasising the connection with Lepakshi by virtue of not convincingly illustrating the later style.

The first element she examines is the division of the narrative space which at Lepakshi "is not as painstakingly subdivided as Hampi."[13] With regards to the Telangana scrolls, the 1625 piece contrasts with the later ones for the same reasons. The narrative on the 1625 is light and flowing with a sense of harmony between the figures' size, the stable postures and their position within the registers. In Mittal's c. 1750 Padmasali scroll however (acc. no. 76470) (Fig. 2. 9), which is the second oldest dated scroll, the narrative has been extended dramatically by creating more registers and more subdivisions into the space of these registers, as seen in Hampi.

Dallapiccola takes the comparison further with the motif of the cusped arches. As she reports from Cooper, the cusped arches became popular in South India during the reign of Shah Jahan post-1627.[14] It is not so much the exact motif of the cusped arch that interesting here but the use of these arches to frame the deities at Hampi and emphasise their "hieratic stature."[15] There are two aspects to this with regards to the Telangana scroll. The first one is that the 1625 scroll, unlike at Hampi and in the later scrolls (post-1800s) do not frame the trimurti under an architectural element and the three deities are usually depicted in profile. The second point is that each of these arch framing devices in the later scrolls do not show resemblance with the cusped arches of Hampi but instead, the cusped arch at Hampi frames Ganesha in the first register of the 1625 scroll (Fig. 2. 2 reg. 1).

The c. 1800 scroll share elements with the nineteenth century Hampi paintings like the frontal depiction of deities under architectural devices (Fig. 2. 10 and 2. 11). These elements cannot be seen at either Lepakshi or on the 1625 scroll which definitely locates the 1625 scroll within the Lepakshi tradition. However the cusped arch which became

[12] Dallapiccola. "Vijayanagara and Nayaka Paintings," 280.
[13] Ibid., 278.
[14] Ibid., 270.
[15] Ibid., 279.

popular after 1627 was already depicted in the scroll dated 1625.[16] Even if the scroll dating is uncertain, the stylistic connection with Lepakshi in addition to the exchanged date stating 1644 makes Mittal's dating rather secure. One century later on the early nineteenth century scrolls, the arched deities were already used in the scroll painting tradition and in the nineteenth century Hampi under the cusped arch form.

The comparison between the c. 1800 scroll and the Hampi painting (Fig. 2. 11 and 2. 12) proves convincing with regards to general pictorial principles as it were the case with the 1625 scroll and Lepakshi. Here, the division of registers into scenes with greater compartmenting for the figures is seen on both the later scroll and at Hampi. Architectural elements have come to play a more important role here as well in separating scenes and framing deities. Finally, the free flowing line of the Lepakshi that was still felt in the 1625 scroll only remains as to further emphasise the separation of the pictorial entities.

c. **South Indian narrative paintings**

The observation of the Lepakshi ceiling in comparison with the 1625 scroll does prove some level of association worth considering in the history of the Telangana scrolls as proposed by Mittal. The connection however seems to be based on pictorial principles that may be attributed to south Indian narrative paintings more broadly rather than specificities strictly attributed to Lepakshi. These principles may be found later on other scrolls and at Hampi too and each painting uses these principles in its own way. For instance, the borders at Lepakshi are made of floral designs that are found in the 1625 scroll border as well, in similar colours but more saturated and simplified. The figures on the 1625 scroll have similar gesture and posture as those in Lepakshi but stand in full profile whereas they stand in three quarters at Lepakshi. With regards to narrative painting, Dallapiccola has pointed out that "Vijayanagara and the following Nayak specialised in the depiction of extensive narrative."[17] These principles are definitely taken further in the nineteenth century scrolls and in the paintings of the late Nayaka period such as Hampi. If these are mere observations, put together they contribute to a more organic understanding of the south Indian painting tradition, moving back and forth between what is seen in temple and what is seen in folklore. Perhaps it is more

[16] Ibid.
[17] Dallapiccola. "Vijayanagara and Nayaka Paintings," 274.

appropriate then, to see the Telangana scrolls as part of this specialisation on narrative rather than as a folk adaptation of Lepakshi.

d. **Deccani painting**

Turning to the seventeenth century northern Deccan where the 1625 scroll and most of the others were produced, the best known examples of paintings the first painting genre that comes to mind is the Deccani School of miniature painting. The School flourished during the Muslim presence in the Deccan region from the late thirteenth to the nineteenth century.

Apart from few elements such as what Mark Zebrowsky calls the "typically Indian suggestion of mass," and that in fact may be shared by several other Indian painting style, there is no striking similarity between the Telangana scrolls and Deccani miniatures.[18] The largely differing format of the two painting traditions as well as the highly narrative dimension of the scroll makes stylistic comparisons rather difficult. Nonetheless, the change of name from Chitrakar to Nakashi possibly shows the local artisans' awareness of the Deccani court painters' context. Apart from this, each of the Padmasali scroll in collections (Jagdish Mittal, British Museum, Calico Museum), all have in their final register a scene where the local king and sometimes the noblemen around him, are wearing Deccani courts' costumes. It is impossible to know if the use of these costumes stopped over time and when as there are no scrolls of the Padmasali collected after the nineteenth century. This detail speaks of an exchange of motifs across different traditions but not evidently of the influences of a painting style onto the other. In this case, these costumes rather constitute the material culture of the region and period and may not be associated to a particular style of painting.

If we look at the scrolls of the Padmasalis and their evolution across the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century (Fig. 2. 2 and 2. 9), the narrative tends to increase. It increased however in dividing the story into more registers and more scenes, rather than in elongating the scroll that only grew less than a meter long. There is also an increase of the numbers of characters in each scene. This gives a more crowded effect to the later scrolls with a lot more of small characters in the manner of miniature. In this regard, it

[18] Michell, George., and Mark Zebrowski. *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 209-210.

is worth mentioning an element that came up regularly as I discussed painting genres with the contemporary Cheriyal painters. In the present-day, Cheriyal painters regard miniatures very highly and appreciate being compared to miniature painters.[19] In the context of award competitions, which I explore in more detail in Chapter 5, the painters almost systematically submit 'miniature Cheriyal paintings.' If this might have come from the popularisation of certain art forms such as miniature through its prestigious position within museums hence later encountered by the painters, it nevertheless reveals the widespread knowledge about the painting style and the influence of the more classical art forms onto the more regionalised. The way current painters interpret miniatures is quite literal and their paintings of miniature style Cheriyal mainly becomes a small version of the long narratives on scrolls rather than a small depiction of a single scene the way we think of the miniature schools in India. The narrative dimension that is so characteristic of the Telangana scroll and to South India is maintained in a miniature style and the pictorial output is quite different to that of a miniature. The present may speak for the past here and the current emulation of the miniature style into the narrative idiom might reflect similar understanding reflected in the nineteenth century scrolls too.

e. **Cultural context in the Deccan**

If stylistic connections between Cheriyal scrolls and Deccani painting are not so evident, the complex history of the Deccan region may be helpful in understanding the context of our paintings. Before the arrival of the Sultans from Delhi in 1294, the Deccan was occupied by three dynasties – the Yadavas, the Kakatyas and the Hoysalas, roughly divided into Marathi, Telugu and Kannada speaking areas. The Kakatyas' territory approximately corresponded with portions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and their capital was Warangal, few kilometres away from Cheriyal. In 1347, Alaudin Bahman Shah founded the Bahmani sultanate after a revolt against the Delhi Sultanate and introduced the presence of Muslim rulers over Telangana until 1948. From the fourteenth century onwards, the region was occupied by several dynasties of sultans who brought a lot of foreign cultural elements into the Deccan region, followed by the arrival of the British and the further development of trade.

[19] This came regularly in my interaction with each painter.

According to Zebrowski and Michell, the Sultans' courts were also interacting with local administration and important local Hindu Kings (rajas) in the later phase. [20] Besides, the Mughals, though established in the Deccan for a relatively short period, brought with them Rajput noblemen, especially from Bundi, Kotah and Bikaner in Rajasthan. These Rajputs could have easily continued to develop patronage where there were newly situated. With the arrival of the Marathas in the late seventeenth century, the region also witnessed a revival of Hindu traditions, to counter the then Mughal and later British control.[21] Zebrowski and Michell link this to the increased popularity of Hindu pilgrimage sites that could have had an influence on the depiction of paintings as well.[22] They also talked about a reminiscence of South Indian motifs especially the floral borders, which were a characteristic of Vijayanagara murals and a persistent trait of Telangana scrolls and Cheriyal paintings.

The Telangana region is far from being homogeneous and interrelation between regions and art practices deserves more attention. In this regards, Zebrowski made a pertinent observation with regards to the Deccani School of miniature that the most localised and indigenous form was from Golconda, the Sultanate that ruled over Telangana until the Mughals arrived in 1687. [23] In spite of an overwhelming Muslim court culture since the thirteenth century, the territory remained mainly populated by local Hindu and Telugu speakers, and the local culture, religious practices and visual folklore remained largely independence from the courtly culture.[24] Navina Najat Haidar and Marika Sardar with Sultans of the South proposed a step forward in the understanding of the local patronage taking place in parallel to that of the Deccani courts.[25]

f. **Conclusion**

The confirmation of indigenous patronage in Telangana from the fourteenth century onwards, in parallel to that of the royal courts proposed an interesting avenue for the history of scroll paintings. In being fundamentally a Hindu practice rooted in the

[20] Michell, George., and Mark Zebrowski. *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 153.
[21] Ibid., 20.
[22] Ibid., 21.
[23] Ibid., 193.
[24] Michell and Zebrowski. *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates*, 153. and Haidar and Sardar. *Sultans of the South: Arts of India's Deccan Courts, 1323-1687*.
[25] Haidar, Navina Najat., and Marika Sardar. *Sultans of the South: Arts of India's Deccan Courts, 1323-1687*. New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press, 2012.

legitimisation of lower castes in front of wealthy landowners or Kings, the scroll paintings from Telangana were more directly connected to the local Hindu culture. Their visual language however, seem rather disconnected from the nobility's reality as much as that of the court. In light of these suppositions, the South Indian lengthy narrative painted on temple might have not only been a source of stylistic inspiration but a functional one too. For instance, the development of *shtalapuranas*, the foundation legends of a temple that came about in the Vijayanagara period, may indicate a further connection with the *kulapuranas*, the foundation legends of a clan or a caste; but this is not within the scope of this thesis.

4. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Cheriyal paintings and visual folklore

a. Kalamkari

The ceilings of the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi, of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi and also the Telangana scrolls are not the only examples of extensive painted narratives. As part of this narrative tradition, we may consider the kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu as well. Kalamkari are paintings made on cloth using a *kalam* (pen). The paintings serve as temple hangings and canopies and depict large narratives of the Epics and Puranas as well as the founding legends of a temple (*shtalapuranas*).[26] The oldest surviving example dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and they are still produced to date.[27] Today however, printed textiles, notably from Machilipatnam, are also known as kalamkari along with the traditional pen work form Sri Kalahasti. Both centres have come to represent the kalamkari tradition within Indian Handicrafts. Similarities between the Telangana scrolls and the kalamkari lie in their narrative dimension, the overall organisation of the space into registers and scenes, and the predominance of deep red.

Apart from these stylistic elements, both paintings connect in their function as 'temple.' Both depict and embody deities that may be worshipped by the viewers of the paintings.

[26] Dallapiccola. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. 9-11.
[27] Ibid., 9.

This particular role as mobile and ephemeral temple is an important trait of these painted narratives on portable supports, seen in Western India too and which I will talk about further in a following section.

Both painting tradition serve narrative purpose but the organisation of these narrative on painting however differs.[28] The organisation of the narrative space on a kalamkari usually lays registers either one after the other from top to bottom or in circle around a central scene (Fig. 2. 14).[29] The reading may therefore be from top to bottom and left to right or more complex. Whichever way, kalamkaris are made to be opened in full, and the narrative to be seen entirely at once. This is fundamentally different than the Telangana scrolls which need to be unfolded as the storytelling goes. The Telangana scrolls do not allow a full view but instead a partial view of the narrative. In this respect, the most recent Cheriyal paintings (not those used in performance) have changed format and orientation and now depict the Ramayana very much adopting the kalamkari full view of the narrative and its organisation. Registers are divided and laid around a central figure that serves at the same time as an episode and as the painting of a deity.

The final observation with regards to the kalamkari is about two pieces recently brought to light through a V&A publication written by Dallapiccola on the story of Gangamma, the goddess of the Gollas and Yadavas, the cow herders of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.[30] The story depicted on the *duppati* (blanket) is that of Katam Raju and regularly painted by the Cheriyal artists as well.[31] In Chapter 4, I propose to look at the Katam Raju Katha narrative in a bit more detail and will mention these hangings as well. But here, I would like to highlight the importance of these kalamkari in showing that the same narrative may be painted in Telangana on scroll or on wooden figurines but also in the more southern kalamkaris. I am not sure we can talk about the same painting tradition here but we can definitely link both through the iconography and the function of these two paintings, which so far had not been attested beyond Telangana.

[28] Ibid., 10.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Dallapiccola. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. 136-55
[31] Dallapiccola. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*, 137.

b. **Paithan painting**

Another narrative tradition that may be of interest for the Telangana scroll is the paintings on paper board known as 'Paithan' paintings. As the Telangana scrolls are now known as Cheriyal paintings, Paithan paintings do not necessarily mean that they were all made in Paithan but some of them have and the name remained as the representative of the tradition.[32] Paithan paintings are made on paper usually around 30 x 40 cm for each board.[33] The papers are pasted onto each other at the back to follow a sequence. All the boards together form a set (*pothi*). These painting are used in the context of performances that narrate mythological and epic stories.[34] Most of the oldest Paithan paintings have been dated to the nineteenth century on the basis of the paper used as a support. There is only one Telangana scroll that has been dated with certainty to the early 1800s on the basis of an inscription, which makes the comparison rather weak.

With regards to Paithan paintings, I would like to concentrate on one particular aspect that we may find in Mittal's nineteenth century scroll of the Madel Purana too (acc. no. 76.474) (Fig. 2. 15 and 2. 16), which is the puppet like posture of the figures and the articulation of the body's limbs in straightforward gestures. This has been observed in Paithan paintings by Dallapiccola but also earlier by Eva Ray.[35] Both note the profile depiction of the characters' faces and feet whereas the chest is frontal.[36] The motif of the eye has been particularly pointed too as it is wide opened, with a full round pupil in the middle and red dots on the angles.[37] If we concentrate on this single stylistic feature, it is possible to find resemblance in the Madel Purana scroll. The scroll is painted for the Chakkali caste of washermen and narrates the story of the hero founder of the caste Madivelaiah who would wash the gods' cloth to pay for his father's sins. His father Virabhadra had cut Daksha's head. Thangavelu gives a more detailed account of the story in her thesis.[38] On the scroll that Mittal has stylistically dated 1840-50, the fierce figure of Virabhadra in blue, multi armed and in the action of cutting Daksha's head has

[32] Stache-Rosen, Valentina. "Story-Telling in Pingulī Paintings." *Artibus Asiae* 45, no. 4 (1984): 253-86.
[33] Ray, Eva. "Documentation for Paiṭhān Paintings." *Artibus Asiae* 40, no. 4 (1978): 240.
[34] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 278.
[35] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* and Ray, Eva. "Documentation for Paiṭhān Paintings."
[36] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 279-80 and Ray, Eva. "Documentation for Paiṭhān Paintings." 245.
[37] Eva ray 241 dallapiccola ibid.
[38] Thangavelu, *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India*, 1998.

a rather similar depiction as figures seen on Paithan paintings. The chest is broad and frontal, the feet and head in profile. The arms and legs are straight and articulated as in puppetry. Finally, the eye is wide opened and dilated, the angles are coloured in red and the black pupil occupies the centre of the almond shape. It is difficult to date this painting but an observation of the eye across several scrolls over time does highlight a change from a half shut pupil to the big shadow puppet-like eye.

Another painting of the same narrative, painted at the time of Thangavelu's fieldwork in 1993 in Cheriyal by Vaikuntam and Chandraiah Nakash shows a similar depiction of the eye and the body posture of the hero Medivalaiah (Fig. 2. 17). A full reproduction is available in Thangavelu's thesis.[39] This definitely confirms the continuity of this particular depiction within this narrative but also the connection with the Paithan painting directly or indirectly through that of the puppet tradition that shows similar depiction of the characters too (Fig. 2. 18). As a further comparison, the depiction of the wide opened eye and the straightforward posture may be seen in the painting of the ceiling of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi too (Fig. 2. 19). The presence of this particular element in temple paintings, but also in different folk art form of Marathi, Telugu, and Kannada speaking region, makes this worth considering while understanding the region's painting history.

As I hinted while talking about the history of the Deccan, the Marathas ruled a part of the Deccan and Western India from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth and the arrival of the British. The Chitrakathi settled in Maharashtra, northern Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh claim to be Marathas.[40] Although this information is not visually confirmed, the Chitrakathi performers of Paithan paintings have used wooden figurines in some of their performance.[41] Valentina Stache-Rosen in *Storytelling in Pinguli* mentioned in 1984 about performing families in Gundipudi using with paper boards, others with string puppets and others with shadow puppet.[42] It is clear that the Chitrakathi are performers of stories with visual aids, ranging from a variety of support. In Telangana, the Mandaheccus perform with sets of wooden figurines known as dolls. It is not possible to confirm whether these dolls look like the

[39] Ibid.
[40] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 278.and eva ray 239. and
[41] Moor 1794 cited in Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 278.
[42] Stache-Rosen. "Story-Telling in Pingulī Paintings," 254.

ones once used by the Chitrakathi but the performers of the Katam Raju Katha for which the dolls are made speak a Marathi dialect, spoken by apparently most of the puppeteers in Telangana, which makes the connection worth considering too.[43]

Stache-Rosen mentions that the Chitrakathi located their origin in Rajasthan.[44] As they were hired in the late seventeenth century by Maratha armies as spies in south India, they migrated south.[45] As the Marathas settled in Poona, the performers settled in the Ratnagiri district. Dallapiccola explains that the fifteenth and sixteenth century saw the arrival of Marathi speakers into South India initially interested in controlling the agrarian economy and that the performers might have migrated south with them.[46] Once again, this is not indicative of any one-way possibility for the Telangana scroll but instead reflect the exchanges that took place within the region, potentially from western Indian to the Deccan and further south, coming back to the Deccan. Along the way, several folk art forms could gather influence from one another. The predominance of Marathi speaking in the puppetry and doll performance of the Deccan however indicates a highly possible connection with the present day Maharashtra.

5. The importance of *phad* painting and *kavad* from Rajasthan

To complete this survey of the painting traditions that the Telangana scroll might have similarities with, I would like to talk about the *phad* (cloth) paintings (Fig. 2. 20) from Rajasthan and their counterpart in wooden boxes known as *kavad* (Fig. 2. 21). The *phad* and the Telangana scrolls present many similarities in their materiality and function but it is with the *kavad* that in fact most important comparisons are to be made. In Telangana, the Gollas and Yadavas commission their narrative with wooden figurines known as "dolls" rather than scrolls which have a lot in common with the *phad* too. I present these cross comparisons and how they reveal much about both traditions.

[43] The Folklorists at the Telugu University Warangal told me that have recordings of performances in Marathi.
[44] Stache-Rosen. "Story-Telling in Pingulī Paintings," 254.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 278.

a. **The commission of a scroll in Telangana and in Rajasthan**

The Telangana scrolls and the *phad* usually are in circulation among performers for several generations as long as they are in useable condition. The making process of a *phad* and a Telangana scroll follows similar steps. In Cheriyal, when a new scroll needs to be made, the performers would visit the painters with an old one and the painters would sketch the new one after the old one. During this process, the performers stay with the painters and follow carefully. The performers then leave. Half way through the completion of the painting, the performers come back and check that everything is as they wished, including possible changes they had asked from the previous scroll they left with the painters. Finally, upon completion, the painters perform a small ceremony where they paint the eyes of the deities and consecrate the scroll before handing it to the performers. As Kavita Singh explains about the *phad*, when a new scroll is to be made, the performers (*bhopas*) visit the painter and place their order. They then leave and the painter will make the painting on the basis of a sketchbook he has been given by his father. Upon completion, the *bhopas* check with the painters if everything is as it should, on the basis of what it was generations ago and as translated on the sketchbook. A ceremony and the painting of the eye are performed too. [47] In both scenarios, the introduction of innovation can only take place as long as it does not alter the narrative and the performers' understanding of it. I explain this further as I speak about fixity and innovation in the scroll painting tradition in Chapter 4.

b. **The narratives**

The *phad* from Rajasthan is used in the performance of local heroes named Pabuji, Devnarayan and Ramdev. These performances take place at night and are conducted by a *bhopa* and a *bhopi* who will set up the ground in front of which the long horizontal scroll will be unfolded. The performance lasts one night long in which the *bhopa* may only narrate parts of the entire story. In Telangana, the performance takes place at night too and is conducted by a troop of performers. A small stage is prepared and the scroll is hung in a way that it can be unfolded progressively as the story goes. The show lasts several nights in which the performers sing and narrate the genealogies of the patrons who commission it.

[47] Singh Kavita, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan" in *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*, ed. Anna L. Dallapiccola, New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011, 117-118.

The stories narrated, in performance and on the scrolls are different in Rajasthan and Telangana. In Rajasthan, the *bhopa* narrates the stories of the local heroes that are usually the tutelary deities of lower cattle caste, Pabuji, Devnarayan and Ramdev. These figures are known as *bhomiya*, a generic term used to qualify the "deified cattle heroes."[48] Singh explains too that the cults of these heroes / gods have been maintained through their adoption as the tutelary deity of particular communities later on. [49] In Telangana however, the narratives depict the Puranas of the local caste through the epic narrative of their founder. The founder is usually a sage and at times a hero too whose ancestor links to the major Hindu gods. The communities that commission these performances have tutelary deities which are usually one of the local goddesses such as Gangamma. They worship the hero or sage founder of the caste as well but not as their tutelary deity unlike in Rajasthan.

Most of caste narratives performed in Telangana and painted on the scroll link the community's genealogy to the main Hindu gods of both Saivite and Vaishnavite sects. The sage or hero intervenes as an intermediary between the community and the gods and not as much the focus as the community he is the ancestor of. It is the come-into-being and the profession of the community which is more important. Moreover, the practise is regulated through a system of *mirasi* (right and responsibility) that attaches the performing communities to only one community of patrons, and even further to only certain villages where these patrons live.[50] In Rajasthan however, the importance is on the folk heroes originating in pastoral communities and who sacrificed themselves to save their cattle. The emphasis is on the hero more than on the filiation with the community.[51]

There is one exception to the genealogical and Puranic narrative style of the Telangana tradition. The story of the Katam Raju Katha is narrated by the Mandaheccu for the Gollas and Yadavas, the cow herding caste of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Unlike the other narratives such as the Padmasalis' or the Chakkalis' which I introduced briefly earlier, the Katam Raju Katha narrates the story of Katam Raju, a local king of the

[48] Ibid., 111.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, 160.
[51] Singh, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan." 111

Yadava dynasty who fought for his land. I develop the story a bit more in Chapter 4. Like the other local caste Puranas of Telangana, the hero's ancestor is a main Hindu god. Krishna has become the ancestor of Katam Raju lineage through the importance of the cow for both the community and the young Krishna.[52] While the Gollas justify their existence in Katam Raju, himself from Krishna, the Mandaheccus earned their interdependence with the Gollas because they helped Katam Raju winning a battle.[53] In spite of this thick genealogical layer, the core of the narrative remains that of a cow herding hero, semi historical in nature alike the Rajasthani heroes, and unlike the other caste Puranas that are highly mythological. Three generations of Rajus are attested in historical records and the Yerragaddapadu battle probably dates of the third quarter of the thirteenth century.[54] The Katam Raju Katha shared more similarities with the *bhomiya* narratives of Rajasthan, in using the visual form and ideology of the Telangana caste Puranas.

c. **The props**

This connection with the Rajasthani tradition is further emphasised by the props used by the Mandaheccus in their performance, different than the scrolls used in the performance of the other narratives. The Mandaheccus use a set of 53 wooden figurines (Fig. 2. 22), among them idols of Gangamma the tutelary deity of the Gollas and Yadavas, but also figurines of the Rajus and of several other characters that take part in the story. Performers usually set the dolls altogether on the floor or on a low table and pick one figure or more as they narrate a scene. The depiction of each character is not individualised and apart from Katam Raju himself, the dolls are in fact all the same divided by categories, the horse rider, the deities, the kings, the female characters. The dolls are painted in a way to offer several combinations of characters. They have fixed skin colours red, blue, and yellow following the convention of the character's category but various enough to allow the interaction of several figurines at the same time without confusion on its identity. There is a degree of particularisation and a degree of generalisation so that each doll can be reused several times in different context with a different identity. This is not possible with the scroll for the caste Puranas. There, each

[52] Rao Narayan V. "Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Katamaraju and Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic" in Hiltebeitel, Alf. *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays On the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*. Albany: State University of New York, 1989. 105-121.
[53] Dallapiccola. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. 132.
[54] Ibid., 133

register and each scene is fixed with a set of characters and these characters are not interchangeable. Furthermore, the sequential presentation of the visual narrative unfolded as the performance goes, does not allow the possibility to reuse the same motifs. The only possibilities of flexibility come from the oral performance of the narrative but not so much from its visual counterpart.

If we now turn back to the Rajasthan *phad*, the scrolls are not to be read chronologically from top to bottom or left to right. John Smith explained that the reading was geographical rather than chronological, dividing the scroll into spaces that represent the different locations of the narrative.[55] Singh completed this in adding a metaphorical mapping to the reading of the scroll, where the closest locations to Pabuji would be towards the centre and the furthest towards the extremities of the scroll.[56] She adds to this a hierarchical and moral reading of the painting where main deities occupy the top of the scroll and more common figures the bottom, and Pabuji crossing each space.[57] But perhaps more striking than the complex reading of the *phad*, it is the "repetitiveness and undifferentiated quality of the images" that is particularly enlightening here.[58] On the *phad* like with the Mandaheccu's dolls, the same figure may serve several identities or several moods.[59] The painting and figures are generalised to the extent that a scroll of Pabuji may even be converted into one of Devnarayan with the mere transformation of Pabuji's spear into Devnarayan's snake.[60] The *phad* is important to the *bhopa* not as an aide-memoire to his recitation but as a prop to illustrate his tale, which is much more alike the Katam Raju Katha performance in Telangana and their use of dolls than the highly narrative Telangana scrolls.

d. **The 'kavad'**

If the *phad* is closer to the doll performance than the scroll one in Telangana, it is not the only indication of the connection between both traditions. If we turn to Basi, which Tryna Lyons looks at in the context of the Mewari artists, we learn that craftsmen at

[55] Smith, John D. *The Epic of Pabuji*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 56.
[56] Singh, Kavita. "Fixed Image in a Changing World: The Phad paintings of Rajasthan." in *The Kingdom of the Sun: Indian Court and Village Art from the Princely State of Mewar,* edited by Joanna Williams, San Francisco, 2007, 71-2.
[57] Ibid. P. 71-72
[58] Singh, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan," 116.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

Basi would supply "most of Rajasthan with woodcrafted objects for the past several hundred years […] among them marionettes, toys deity images, masks used in popular theatre performances and ritual objects" and the *kavad.*[61] The *kavad* is a wooden portable shrine used in performances as well. The travelling storytellers are called *kavadiya bhats* and they usually order their own *kavad* with specificities that relate to the patrons for which the performance will be narrated, very much alike the Telangana scrolls. These boxes have several doors and layers that are opened progressively to reach out to the deities or images of the patrons located in its centre.[62] The small portable shrine also serves the purpose of bringing the temple to the worshippers, as it is with the *phad* too.

If we look at the *kavad* a bit closer, there is a sense of pictorial generalisation to a certain extent which may be justified by the specificities of the *kavad* performances. The *kavadiya bhats* perform a wide range of narratives about the life of Saints and some portions of the Epics. But the main function of the *kavadiya bhats* is to narrate the genealogies of specific patrons.[63] These patrons are defined through inheritance and the performers remain attached to them from their fathers. This structure is much stricter than that of the *bhopa* and at the same time much closer to the *mirasi* system that guides most of the caste Puranas' performances in Telangana. I explain this later in Chapter 4 but the performers in Telangana are associated to a certain amount with patrons in certain villages and are not allowed to perform in front of other castes. The storyteller too, may be called for a specific celebratory moment such as the birth of a child or visit his patrons himself regularly without notice.[64] There is no certitude that the patron-performers interdependence is as strict in Rajasthan, but definitely based on similar principle of service and duty exchanges.

The performance of both the *kavad* and the caste Puranas' scroll takes place at the patrons' place and the performer praises the generosity of their patrons.[65] The recitation is in two parts, the first one that includes the invocation of the major Hindu deities and the second that concentrates on the patron's genealogy. In both cases, the performers sing in the present tense. In Rajasthan, the performers recite the patrons' genealogies

[61] Singh. "Fixed Image in a Changing World: The Phad paintings of Rajasthan." 38-9.
[62] Sabnani Nina, "The kavad phenomenon A folk Tradition of Rajasthan." in *Indian Painting: The Lesser-known Traditions*, ed. Anna L. Dallapiccola, New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2011, 97
[63] Ibid., 96.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibis., 97

from memory but have a small notebook where these are recorded. Each *kavad* is associated to a particular patron and identified by his initials written next to his figure on the box. The performers in Telangana do not have a notebook with a record of the narratives but instead, use the scroll as their visual aid. Both performers follow a certain chronology which makes use of suspense and drama as a new scene is unfolded on the scroll or a new door opened on the *kavad*.[66] In spite of the progressive nature of the narrative on the Telangana scrolls, performers as in the *kavad* performance, take the liberties to step back from the scroll for long hours to narrate one particular event and contemporise it with local anecdotes not depicted on the painting.

There is evidence of similar portable shrines with narratives depicted on the doors in Telangana too. One example is at DakshinaChitra in Chennai and the other in the Telugu University Warangal Museum (Fig. 2. 23). They have been introduced by Mittal in the *Deccani Kalam*[67] and in his most recent publication *Deccani Scroll Paintings* as well.[68] These are no longer produced and the Cheriyal painters explained their function rather vaguely, calling these objects mobile temples. The paintings around the box follow the red convention of Cheriyal scroll and Rajasthani *kavad* paintings and the deity inside is similar to Gangamma in the Katam Raju doll set. Dallapiccola in the British Museum Catalogue of South Indian Paintings too, discussed two albums of sketches and drawings depicting the castes of Tamil Nadu, and where two folios depict almost identical portable shrines with the goddess enshrined and the doors painted (British Museum 0913,0.63 and 0503,0.2).[69] This brings us back more clearly to South India than to Rajasthan.

The caste Puranas of Telangana find their functional counterpart in the *kavad* in Rajasthan while the cattle hero narrative on the Rajasthani *phad* connects with the Golla's genealogies in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. This is fundamental to understand these traditions individually as much as together. Each of them is linked to another through only some elements of what all they encompass. It may be the ideology behind these performances such as the genealogies of patrons, strictly attached to their performers as in both the Telangana scroll and the *kavad*. It may also be the use of

[66] Lyons Tryna, "Mewari perspectives; Udaipur, Nathdadwara, Basi." in *The Kingdom of the Sun: Indian Court and Village Art from the Princely State of Mewar,* edited by Joanna Williams, San Francisco, 2007, 40.
[67] Welch and Mittal. "Portfolio."
[68] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 8.
[69] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 195 and 210.

generalising props in the performance as in the Katam Raju Katha and the *phad* painting. This indicates two different domains of interrelations, one that connects these traditions through their material culture, and the other through the function of these performances channelled through the nature of the narrative. To add to the complexity, the Mandaheccu performers in Telangana speak a dialect of Marathi among themselves and Telugu as they perform. This brings an extra layer with regards to the origins of the performers themselves and the importance they might have had in the performance narrative and the choice of its visual props.

6. Conclusion on the history of Cheriyal painting

None of what has been presented here really gives secure indication on what came first and where it came first. The connection with already dated temple paintings such as the sixteenth century Lepakshi and the nineteenth century Hampi provides us with a possible origin for the scroll. But beyond temple paintings, the connection with folk art forms from Western India from the nineteenth century onwards proves significant. Moreover, several features such as the organisation of the pictorial space into compartment, the thick black line, or the heavy limbs, all are shared by paintings across classical and folk traditions, across different regions like the Deccan and South India, but also across different media and supports such as murals, scroll, paper and cloth. This is without taking into consideration the origin of the people who are behind these traditions, the patrons, the performers and the makers of the objects that could make a good case to understand the origin of a contemporary practice as well.

The South Indian narrative idiom is transposed onto cloth in the northern Deccan but its association to the performance of local hero and the genealogies of a particular caste that may indicate a Western Indian function. Across Gujarat and Rajasthan, there are castes of genealogist that keep records of their patrons in manuscripts. The patrons are strictly associated to their genealogists who would visit them regularly to update the records. It is tempting to see the caste Puranas of Telangana as a form of genealogical record into painting, but that would be distracting from the function of these Puranas, to assert the patrons' community's existence and social status. In this regards, the Telangana scroll may then be associated to the genre of the *shtalapurana*, the genre that

narrate the foundation myth of sacred places in the manner of a Purana in order to bring importance to these provincial sites. The Telangana scroll tradition find a space in between, using the genealogical format to present the foundation myth of a caste.

Could we then consider the Telangana scroll performance as a hybrid genre? To a certain extent, one could say that folk traditions would generally lead to this conclusion if they were to be looked at through their connections with other art forms. For instance, the *phad* form Rajasthan may be seen as a transposition of murals onto canvas as well.[70] The kalamkaris were used within the temple but also as a temple. The Rajasthani *phad* has turned into temple for those whose deity does not have a temple. Some of the performers of caste Puranas in Telangana perform in Telugu with a scroll whereas others perform in Marathi with dolls. In Rajasthan too, some perform *bhomiya* narratives with a *phad* whereas others narrate genealogies with a *kavad*. Similar portable shrines with narratives decorating the little doors have been found in Telangana, and further south in Tamil Nadu.

More recent scrolls from Cheriyal have shown new motifs such as perspective and the inclusion of farming scenes into the painting. These come from other sources, a western naturalist convention of depiction for the former, and the government's interest for rural India for the latter. In addition to this, if we think of the present day development of Pata painting which I explore in detail in Chapter 5, Cheriyal painting shares more features with its contemporaries from Orissa and West Bengal than with the South or Western Indian; they visit the same museum, the same markets and depict the same iconography. This only supports the relevance of trajectories more than origin, if not for all art forms at least for Cheriyal paintings.

[70] Smith, John D. *The Epic of Pabuji*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 68.

Chapter III

Paintings in Cheriyal

1. Scroll paintings for performances

When Jagdish Mittal first encountered the scroll paintings for performances in the 1960s, he contacted the then Cheriyal painter Venkatramaiah and enquired about painting centres in the region.[1] The late Venkatramaiah revealed the presence of painting centres in four of the eight districts of Telangana: Warangal, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, and Adilabad.[2] Presently, only one centre remains in Cheriyal, a village of around twenty-five thousand inhabitants in the Jangaon division of the Warangal district in Telangana (Fig. 3. 1). In Telangana, the storytellers are still performing with the aid of a scroll, and all come to Cheriyal to get it painted. The centre also produces paintings on walls and statues of deities (*murti*) for temples in Cheriyal and the outskirts. Cheriyal and the Nakashi painting community are the focus of my observations.

The production, presentation and reception of temple and scroll paintings remain within the confines of Cheriyal and other villages in Telangana. This chapter aims to understand the social and cultural setting of the locality through its material culture - the paintings - leading to a first definition of what Cheriyal paintings are. It combines information gathered from Jagdish Mittal's (2014) and Kirtana Thangavelu's (1998) previous research on the subject, later updated with the painters themselves while on fieldwork in 2014-15.

a. *Kulapuranas* in Telangana

The oldest known function of the paintings produced in Cheriyal is to partake in performances of the local castes' genealogies, also known as *kula* (lineage or family)

[1] Mittal. *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 15.
[2] Ibid., 22. "Warangal district: Hanamkonda and Materu, Karimnagar district: Koratla, Jagtial, Peddapalli, and Tippapuram, Nizamabad district: Balkonda, Adilabad district: Nirmal."

Puranas.[3] It is difficult to know with certainty the geographical extent of the performance tradition using scroll painting but the current practice reveals boundaries no further than the Telangana state. Finding out where exactly the performances still take place was unfortunately not within the scope of this thesis and I am not able to list these villages. Tracking down patrons' communities in concordance with the last ten-twenty years of commissions to the painters could probably help in finding out these localities. A general sense of the situation gained from discussions with the painters and scholars on the subjects allows me to say that the performance practice keeps decreasing, which means that it would not exceed – and perhaps would even be less than – the districts of Telangana listed by Mittal in his last publication[4] i. e. Adilabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Nalgonda, Medak, Khammam and Mahboobnagar (Fig. 3. 1). The first four districts correspond to the painting centres Venkatramaiah listed for Mittal in the 1960s. We could speculate that there had been a painting centre in each of the other districts too in order to supply the local performers with their scroll and various objects, but this information cannot be confirmed.

In Telugu, these Puranas may be known as *Puranam* or *Puranamu*. The use of the word Purana for naming these genealogical narratives offers two important indications to their function. The first one comes from the meaning of Purana in Sanskrit, '*old,'* and that confers in these narratives an ancient origin. The second is the direct association with the literary genre of the Purana, which enjoys a classical and authoritative status within Hindu religious literature. The Puranas deal with five specific themes, creation, re-creation, genealogies, Manu-cycles of time, and the histories of dynasties.[5] They are divided into 18 Maha-Puranas and 18 Upa-Puranas, the former dealing with the themes mentioned above and the latter relating to local gods and cults.[6] Apart from those, there are several other texts that claim to be Puranas, among them the caste Puranas.[7] Considered as an alternative "folk Purana." the *kulapuranas* narrate the genealogies of a particular caste and its divine origin.[8]

[3] Claus, Peter J., Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Ann Mills. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 100.
[4] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 12.
[5] Das, Veena "A Sociological Approach to the Caste Puranas : A Case Study" in *Sociological Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1968), 141.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ramanujan "On Folk Mythologies and Folk Puranas" in O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1993, 101-120.

Most of the literature on the *kulapuranas* of Telangana is available in vernacular Telugu. Prof. Subachary, head of the department of Folklore and Tribal Studies of the Dravidian University in Kuppam in Andhra Pradesh published his PhD in 2000 on the *Caste myths and dependent caste system of Telugus.*[9] He also recorded the Jambavanta Purana, the caste Purana of the Madiga, the leather workers of Telangana. The Telugu University in Warangal recorded several performances of the caste Puranas of Telangana as well, as part of the activities of the Folklore Society of South Indian Languages (FOSSILS). FOSSILS is a scholarly and non-profit organisation launched in 1988 that researches and promotes the dissemination of knowledge about South Indian folklore across field activities, cross-states projects and conferences. The various projects of the organisation are conducted through folklore departments of universities in each of the South Indian state. In Telangana, the department of Tribal and Folk Lore at the Telugu University Warangal conducted an archival project in 2003 that researched, recorded and databased performance traditions of Telangana and portions of Andhra Pradesh.[10] Among the Telugu University recording, two of the performances use a scroll as a visual aid. The first one is a performance by the Kakipadigela for the Mudiraj or Mutrasi patrons, a caste of land workers and fishermen in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The Kakipadigela performs portions of the Mahabharata as the genealogy of the Mudiraj. The second performance is conducted by the Kunapuli for the Padmasali caste of weavers in Telangana. The Kunapuli narrate with the help of a scroll, portions of the Markandeya Purana and Bhavana rishi stories as their visual aid. Another one of the FOSSILS' recordings shows a performance of the Katam Raju Katha, the story of the cattle hero Katam Raju by the Mandaheccus for the Gollas and Yadavas, the cow herding caste of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. These performers use wooden figurines in their performance. Unfortunately, none of these recording have yet been transcribed into English and it is difficult to say more about these narratives.

Along with the efforts of these universities in Telugu, Thangavelu worked on the narrative of the Madel Purana for her PhD research.[11] In 1993, she recorded a performance of the narrative as told by the Ganjilotulus for the Chakkali caste of

[9] Subachary P. *Teluguglo Kulapuranalu Asritavyastha* (A Study of Caste Myths and Dependent Caste System of the Telugus). Hyderabad: Prajashakti Book House. 2000 (in Telugu)

[10] They created a software database and gave me a sample of it. It lists all the performances that they have recorded with explanations for each community.

[11] Thangavelu, *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*

washermen in Telangana. She corroborated the recording with a painting that was produced in the same year. Sadanandam in 2008 approached the narratives from the performers and through their interdependent relation with their patron caste.[12] Mittal proposed in his last publication (2014) a summary of five of the narratives based on the scrolls he has collected over time. As the painters paint a new scroll after an old one, they do not usually know the narratives. To gather information for his publication, Mittal requested Vaikuntam in 2010 to collect information from the performers who were still commissioning scrolls.[13] Finally, for his PhD research in English from the English and Foreign Language University (EFLU) Hyderabad, Laxman Aelay chose to look at the one case study of the Markandeya Purana / Bhavana Rishi narrative, performed for the Padmasalis by the Kunapuli. He started his research in 2013 and has been collecting several recording as well as scroll and images which should soon be gathered into a documentary.

Several studies on "folk Puranas" from other regions than Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in India have brought to light information on the function and necessity of these genealogical narratives. Veena Das[14] and Romila Thapar[15] have looked at the particular case of the Barot caste of genealogists from Gujarat. The Barots record in manuscripts the genealogies of their patron castes, the Brahmans and Banyas. Beyond the mere record of generations, these records would take part in a legitimising process initiated by the patron caste at times of land dispute or warfare.[16] The origin of the caste Puranas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is unknown but similar necessities to assert a particular caste's existence at time of conflict with other surrounding communities may well be considered. Sadanandam, citing Rama Raju, proposed the hypothesis of minstrels associated to particular military caste and following their patrons to provide entertainment at time of war. After the passing conflict, these dependent castes would remain associated to their patrons and continue providing entertainment.[17] This theory makes a possible connection with the Vahivanca Barot of Gujarat, genealogists of the

[12] Sadanandam P., *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, New Delhi: Gyan, 2008
[13] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*.
[14] Das, Veena. *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*. Delhi ; Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1977.
[15] Thapar, Romila. *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*. London: Sangam, 1996. Thapar, Romila. *Clan, Caste and Origin Myths in Early India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1992
[16] Ibid., 186. and Thapar, Romila. *Clan, Caste and Origin Myths in Early India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1992. 311.
[17] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*. 40.

Rajput caste, said to have followed them during their battle. [18] At the time of the Mughal Empire, the Rajputs were posted as governors or officers to provinces in the Deccan, possibly bringing with them these genealogists, and establishing a connection with the development of caste narratives in Telangana.[19] As I tried to highlight in the previous chapter, it is difficult to speak for the movement of population in and out of the Deccan across the successive rulers that occupied the Telangana region. A connection with Western India, either to Maharashtra or further away to Gujarat and Rajasthan may be worth considering but not within the scope of this thesis.

In present-day Telangana, these narratives are performed in different drama styles. For the purpose of this research, I was particularly interested in the performances that use visual support for their storytelling. Among those, one community, the Mandaheccus who perform the Katam Raju Katha, use wooden figurines. Apart from this, several communities of the Telangana region choose to use a scroll as their visual aid in the storytelling performance of their Puranas. These stories are painted on long scrolls of around 10 meters, made of a thick canvas cloth, and then presented to a village audience including the patron who commissioned the performance. Because some performances are now extinct and others have not been recorded, the scroll is a valuable source of information on the performed and painted narratives. The painting becomes the only tangible mean to reconstitute the otherwise oral Puranas of these communities. And because the commission, production, presentation, and reception of a scroll involve several castes and communities, it also provides information about them, which I would like to present here. I am also interested in looking at the role of these communities in shaping the scrolls' materiality, and at the interactions the object encourages for these communities. This should introduce the *kulapuranas*, the local communities and the importance of painting among these communities.

b. **Commissioning a scroll for performance**

The making of a scroll painting for the performance of local caste stories follows a strict and conventional system of patronage described at length in Thangavelu's thesis. The following information is a summary of her extensive research on this system of

[18] Shah and Schroff. "The Vahivanca Barot of Gujarat: A caste of genealogists and mythographers."
[19] Michell, George., and Mark Zebrowski. *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 177.

patronage that guides the tradition.[20] Three major groups of people are involved, the patrons and audience, the performers, and the painters. All belong to the lower strata of the Indian caste system. Two groups of patron and their associated performers qualify as Scheduled Caste (SC) and one as Schedule Tribe (ST).[21] All the others, eight groups in total, as well as the painters' community qualify as Other Backward Caste (OBC) classification.

The process of making a scroll starts from the performing community, which is dependent on an associated caste to which they owe their livelihood. They are called an *adugukunetollu* caste (asker) because of their position of 'asker' to their patrons.[22] Patrons and performers both belong to the same caste but the latter experiences a lower status because of his storytelling profession and because of this asking position. Every two to three years, they visit their patrons and ask for remuneration. They are forbidden from going to other castes.[23] At the time of their visit, the patrons must host the storytellers and decide upon the commission of a performance or if they would rather provide money, food and grain and send the performers away until their next visit. A performance is expensive and is rarely ordered. In the event of a performance being commissioned, both the patron and performers would agree on money, time, and organisation and the performers would then go away to come back at the time they agreed for the performance. At this stage, the performers may decide to commission a scroll or not but it is their responsibility and not that of their patrons to bear the expenses.

A new scroll is commissioned when the previous one is no longer usable, has been destroyed, is damaged, or at times when a new bard of performers has formed, mostly hereditarily. A scroll is inherited by the eldest son along with the certificate that lists the villages in which he is allowed to perform.[24] If a scroll needs to be made, the performers will visit the painters and order the making of a new one, which usually takes between three to six months depending on the length of the narrative. The

[20] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 8-88.
[21] There is mention of the Nayak (ST) community of patrons in Reddy Y.A.Sudhakar "Narrative Tradition As a Cultural Allegory: Indian Folklife." *A Quarterly Newsletter*, Serial no: 29 June 2008, 4-7. but whether they still commission performance could not be confirmed.
[22] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 37
[23] Ibid.
[24] Mittal (2014), 13 and Thangavelu (1998), 91-92 both explain the system of inheritance of the scroll.

performers would bring an old scroll to the painter who will copy the main elements as the performers follow the process carefully and intervene to ask for possible alterations in the visual rendering of the story. The process lasts several days and the performers would then leave to come back mid-way to check if everything looked as they dictated. Once the scroll is completed and upon delivery, a small ceremony that may involve a goat sacrifice but certainly payment in cash, food and grain as well as invocations to the gods will confer to the scroll its divine nature and the performers are ready to take it away. This ceremony serves as inputting religiosity to the scroll painting and happens through the painting of the eyes of the main deity by the painter. The 'opening of the eye' (*netronmilana*) is usually conducted for all images in which a deity is considered to inhabit, even if only temporarily. At the time of the performance, the storytellers' troop comes to the village of his patron and takes up temporary residency among the inhabitants. The head of the patrons generally hosts the leader of the performers and other members of the group are dispatched among other members of the patron's caste in the village.

c. **Setting up a performance**

The performance is staged in the village centre and usually takes place at night after the end of people's daily activities and labour. A small stage is set for the occasion; more or less elaborated depending on the arrangements made by the patrons and performers. Every night performance starts with a series of prayers and an invocation to prepare for the telling and to allow most of the audience to join. At this moment, vermillion is applied on the forehead of the important figures of the scroll and of the members of the performers' troop. The scroll is unfolded as the story goes, in accordance with the portions of the narrative being told. It usually takes four to five nights to complete the performance.

The scrolls may be vertical or horizontal. A vertical scroll would be hanged from the top and scrolled up as a new portion of it is unfolded from the bottom. Horizontal scrolls may begin the narrative from the right or the left and be unfolded in the opposite direction as the performance goes. There may be small light in front of the scroll to make it more visible for the audience. The audience sits in front of the stage and may or may not see the figures on the scroll depending on where they sit. The visual narrative is

not a strict illustration of the oral and the scroll painting rather supports the performers' narration, triggering his memory and corroborating his words. For more information on the relation between the oral and visual narrative, Thangavelu has looked at a comparison between a scroll of the Madel Purana and its performance.[25]

d. **The scroll and its painters, performers and patrons**

Thangavelu has worked extensively on the life cycle of a scroll within this local context as well.[26] She observed each community's responsibility in the making of a scroll and acknowledged the necessity of a complex system of patronage in maintaining the tradition alive.[27] In this section, I would like to add to her arguments in suggesting the relation between the religiosity of the tradition and its sustainability as a possible explanation to such a strict and continuous system of patronage.

By performing the 'opening of the eye' ceremony, the painters are responsible for providing the scroll with its sacredness. Once the scroll is given to the performers, they become responsible for maintaining this sacredness by taking care of the scroll, invoking the deities depicting on it before each performance, and disposing of it into water when it is no longer useable. Finally, as the scroll is unfolded and the narrative told, the audience, including the patrons, may exchange *darshan* (worship through the exchange of gaze between the deity and the devotee) with the deities on the scroll and take the religious function of the scroll further to themselves. In short, the sacredness of the scroll starts from the painters' hands to be handed over and maintained by the performers, and presented to the patrons, hence justifying the interrelations of these three communities.

The first thing to mention in this regard is that the scroll, which depicts and embodies deities, is visually interacting with all three communities. All three perform rituals to the scroll and exchange *darshan* with the depicted deities. These acts of worship join three different communities, the patrons, performers and painters together under the same belief in the powerful capacity of the scroll, and under the same religious practice.

[25] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 127.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] Ibid., 12.

Previous research by Thangavelu and Mittal approached the powerful capacity of the scroll in religious terms because of the visual and spiritual presence of the deities on the object, as well as the sacred narrative it depicts. What I would like to suggest here is that the importance of the scroll may also be looked at in a secular manner through its primary function, which makes it a source of income for both the painters and the performers and a source of social legitimacy for the patrons. These secular concerns could then complement our understanding of the tradition's fixity.

Before the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) intervened with Cheriyal paintings by increasing their marketization on handicraft markets, the main activity of the Nakashi painters was to paint for local temples and/or local performing bards, and their livelihood depended primarily on these commissions. These commissions themselves depended on the continuity of the performing practice and the financial capacity of performers to order a new scroll. Painters nowadays could sustain their livelihood on their work for the handicraft market, and it may have been the case that scrolls were never the main source of income. Yet until now, the scroll remains an important part of the painters' overall income and painters never refuse a new scroll commission, regardless of the work they are already engaged in.[28] It is a highly regarded object of work, a financial reward, and an object which responsibility relies on the painters' faculties of accuracy and religiosity. This accuracy is understood in relation to the religious expectations of the scroll and the narrative's fixity, which I shall develop further below.

The second community involved in the consumption of a scroll is the performing caste. In light of Thangavelu's research summarised in this paragraph, about the role of the scroll for the performing caste,[29] I argue that the performers' livelihood depends on the 'well-being' of the object. Performers earn their living from their patrons' donations and in performing the Puranas to them. As performers, their incomes depend on themselves and the scroll is their only material possession. Families who own a scroll may lend or rent it; one family with several male members may share it; it is expensive to make and the performers consider the object with great care. In addition, the patron caste is the one who decides upon the commission of a performance but a performance does not necessarily imply the commission of another scroll. It is the performers' responsibility

[28] 24/02/2014 Discussion with Vinay Nakash.
[29] Thangavelu chapter on the scroll chapter 2 89-116

to have in their possession a scroll in useable condition for the performance but also for the genealogical record, hence to maintain the longevity of the object as much as possible. At times, the patrons may request for the production of a new scroll and therefore help bearing the cost of it, but this is an exception it is the performers' responsibility to keep a scroll as long as possible so that they would not have to bear expenses towards the making of a new one. The making of a scroll is expensive for the storytellers and the painters know it. For this reason, the financial value of the scroll is seen as high for the performers and low for the painters, in light of the work they provide on it.

As for the patrons' relationship with the scroll, it is not exactly financial but rather social. It is important to mention at this point that the temples and scrolls painted by the Nakashis circulate among people of low social status such as backward castes and dalits. Among this population, the patrons hold a rather high status and in spite of being from the same caste as the performers, the performers are considered as a sub-caste, to be understood as lower.[30] Both are related by service and duty. The performers are attached to a certain number of villages (*mirasi*) where their patron caste lives and cannot perform in front of other patrons in other villages.[31] Similarly, the patrons owe the performers charity and financial support.

There is no information about the identity of the castes that used to commission their genealogical narratives in the past in the region. The following table indexes the patron, performers and Puranas still in circulation at the time of my fieldwork. This information has been gathered from the painters and the folklorists at the Telugu University Warangal.

Patrons	**Patron's occupation**	**Performing bard**	**Purana**	**Scroll**
Madiga (SC)	Leather worker	Dakkali / Chindu	Jambavanta Puranam	Horizontal

[30] This is further described p. 84 of this thesis
[31] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 157.

Maala (SC but higher than the Madiga)	Drummers Farmers	Gurrapu (Drummers)	Gurrapu Puranam (Also known as Gurram Mallaiah from their hero Mallaiah, Mix of stories from the Shiva and Garuda Puranas among others)	Possibly horizontal
Mangali (unknown caste classification)	Barbers	Addamuvaru	Addam Purana (Sections of the Ramayana and Mahabharata with variations)	Unknown
Golla / Yadava (OBC)	Cowherds	Mandaheccu	Katam Raju Katha	Wooden figurines and scroll both vertical and horizontal
Goud (OBC)	Toddy tapper / liquor seller	Goudjetti	Goud Puranam (Mix of stories from Gangamma Katha, Shiva Purana)	Vertical
Chakkali / Dhobi (OBC)	Washermen	Ganjilotulu	Madel Puranam (from their hero Madivellaiah, also called Daksha Puranam)	Vertical and horizontal
Mudiraj and Mutrasi (OBC)	Fruit gatherer and fishermen	Kakipadigela	Mudiraj Katha (Sections of the Mahabharata)	Vertical and usually very long
Padmasali (OBC)	Weavers	Kunapuli	Sections of the Markandeya Puranam and Bhavana Rischi Katha	Vertical

Apart from two groups of patrons, the Madigas and the Mallas who classify as Schedule Caste, all the patron communities come from the service castes of India, usually experiencing a low status in the caste structure. Their professions were and for most part, are still are weavers, washermen, land workers, fishermen, cow herders, barbers, and liquor makers and sellers. They classify as Other Backward Caste. The present situation may throw light on the past here and it is highly possible that most of these genealogical performances were commissioned by service castes even before. As for the Madigas and Mallas, the SC castes, they themselves provide service to the other OBC castes. The patron castes enjoy a higher status than the performers yet both belong to lower castes.

The subject matter of these scrolls is to present the 'history' of the patron caste who commissioned the performance under the form of a Purana. The scrolls narrate the story of these castes, their origin and how they came into existence. Divided into professional corporations, these communities find their origins in the major deities of the Saivite and Vaishnavite sects of Hinduism.[32] The narrative will go on to explaining how a major pan-Indian god necessitated the activity of this community at some point in time, therefore creating the first ancestor of both the profession and the caste group. The use of the puranic genre and affiliation to main Hindu deity permits the justification of the caste's occupation, the legitimisation of their existence and the assertion of their present status and its continuity.

The name of the story is known on the basis of the name of the patron caste or that of the main deity or hero of that particular narrative. For instance, the Jambavanta Purana is named after the hero Jambavanta, founder of the Madiga caste for which the story is performed. The Katam Raju Katha is named after Katam Raju, the founder of the Golla caste but also known as the Gangamma Purana, after the Goddess Gangamma, protector of the community and major figure of the Katam Raju Katha. These narratives also borrow from other Puranas, such as the Kunapuli performing parts of the Markandeya Purana for the Padmasali. Finally, others may narrate portions of the Epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The Kakipadigela for instance, narrate the first four *parva* (books) of the Mahabharata (Adi Parva, Sabha Parva, Vana Parva, and Virata Parva) before

[32] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*, 12

shifting to the Mudiraj's part of the narrative for whom the story is performed. Because of the amalgamate nature of the narratives and because the episodes depicted on the scroll do not strictly illustrate the oral narrative, an observation of the scroll alone would not suffice to identify the narratives accurately. The identification of the narrative is only possible in comparison of both the scroll and the performers and with the performers' sole knowledge of the entire narrative, which is something I unfortunately cannot propose in this research.

Alongside the genealogy from the gods to the patrons, a few scrolls may also depict members of the dependent performing community. For instance in one of Mittal's scroll of the Madel Purana c. 1800-1810 (acc. no. 76.473), the last register depicts a male figure carrying a stick on his back onto which two half unfolded scrolls are hanging (Fig. 3. 2).[33] This may be seen as the performer carrying the scroll he uses in his performance. Thangavelu in her thesis observed a similar depiction on the Madel Purana that she was observing at the time of her fieldwork in 1993. So far, I have not been able to observe similar scenes on other scrolls but the presence of this extra layer of genealogy makes the scroll an indispensable tool to understand the complex and dependent relationships between those two communities of the same caste.

Because the genealogy of the entire community is based on these stories, and that the maintenance of their status can only be accounted by the remembrance of these Puranas, the scroll serves as the only tangible proof of these narratives. It is also our only tangible means to understand them. Thangavelu added to this that the scroll "stood in the background [of the performance] as a canonical, authenticating document."[34] This makes the scroll particularly important for the patrons in spite of not being in their possession. In this complexity, the painting is the major source of income for the performers and painters and the major source of social legitimisation for the patrons. Whether they are recorded in the scroll registers, performed, or transferred orally, they contribute in asserting and possibly elevating the status of these castes by making clear that their lineage goes back to the gods, therefore justifying the position of their caste in the local social hierarchy.

[33] Ibid.
[34] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*, 127

The scroll is highly regarded by the painters, performers and patrons because of its religious function, and the sacredness is carries and distributes to each of these communities before, during, and after a performance. Taking this further however, the scroll is also an indispensable source of income for the painters, the performers and an important tool of social legitimacy for the patrons, as well as an opportunity for them to perform charity for their depending caste of performers. Understood as such, the scroll becomes a secular entity that federates three communities and participates in maintaining their relationships with one another as well as their personal position within the local social structure, each performing service and duty for the other. For these reasons, the scroll painting's sacredness may be considered as the result of its secular role in the local social structure, and the righteous and religious conduct that each of the three communities performs towards it contributes to the continuity of this social structure.

However these communities depend on the scroll, it is important to note that each section of the tradition - the visit to the patrons, the making of a scroll, and the performance - are independent to a certain extent and that one does not necessarily speak for the other. The first point is that performers visit their patrons but do not necessarily perform for them. Most of the time, they are sent away with a donation and payment without the planning of any performance. The second thing is that in the event of a performance, a new scroll is not necessarily commissioned. Therefore, the scroll commission reaches the painters less often than the occurrence of a performance and even less often than the visit of the performers to their patrons. The fluctuation in scroll commission does not necessarily imply a fluctuation in the frequency of performance and understanding the history and evolution of such a tradition from the point of view of the scroll would be misleading. For instance, at the time of Thangavelu's fieldwork in 1993[35], Chandraiah Nakashi, Vaikuntam's late brother, explained that in seventy-five years, his father Venkatramaiah had painted between twenty to thirty scrolls and that he had already painted the same amount in only a few years. Vaikuntam himself painted forty to fifty scrolls over 55 years. [36] Chandraiah then explained that they would now receive fewer commissions because the performers keep the scrolls for a very long time and sometimes even undertake repairs rather than commissioning a new one. Vaikuntam told me that his father even painted on both sides of the scrolls once in the

[35] Ibid., 91-97.
[36] Information gathered from a discussion with Vinay Nakash, Vaikuntam's son on the 24/02/2014.

1960s because performers could not afford to bear the cost of making a new cloth.[37] If we consider the making of a scroll as a proof of increase in performance, then one may believe that performance have actually increased from Venkatramaiah's time until now.

Yet scroll-making fluctuates as performances decline. The performing community have a strict system of inheritance in which the scroll belongs to the eldest male member of the family.[38] Upon death, it will be transferred to the eldest male descendant. Other family members who are also in the profession can then rent the scroll or decide to commission a new one for themselves. In fact, most commissions of a new scroll come from a family member investing cash in his own scroll. At the time of Thangavelu's fieldwork, Chandraiah also explained that performers would rather invest cash in a scroll because it is a safe investment for them.[39] This complexity highlights the incompatibility of the scroll and performance frequency in understanding the evolution of the tradition. A decrease in scroll-making cannot be correlated with a decrease in performance yet a decrease in performance will eventually be reflected in the scroll making.

To fully understand the evolution of the performance practice, one must turn towards the patrons' communities. I have not conducted this research myself but I may suggest avenues for further investigation of this aspect of the subject. The evolution of patrons' community at the head of the chain could tell us more about the future of the performance tradition. For instance, the performers of the Ganjilotulu community, performing for the Chakkali go to their patrons and merely show the scroll in exchange of their usual donation. Others such as the Addamuvaru / Barber community have never commissioned a scroll to Vaikuntam and the painter said that they had ceased to perform. The Padmasalis have emancipated from their castes' occupation and changed profession or shifted to bigger towns. Vaikuntam said he never received commissions from them.[40] Laxman Aelay however, a member of the Padmasali community and a contemporary painter of the Hyderabad scene, recorded the Padmasalis' performances and confirmed that the community was still commissioning performances, though

[37] 09/04/2014 Rakesh:"Paintings are also repaired and my grandfather even painted on both sides sometimes."
[38] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 92.
[39] Ibid.
[40] 27/02/2014 Rakesh: "Weavers and barbers have never commissioned to us. Barbers there are no performers at all any more."

rarely.[41] With such sparse information, it is evident that a study of the patrons' community would prove more efficient in understanding the evolution of the tradition.

e. **The paintings**

The function of these scrolls is to be hung during the performance of local caste Puranas and sections of the painting are unfolded progressively as the storytellers narrate the story. The audience sits watches and listens to the performance, and looks at the scroll in the meantime (Fig. 3. 3). This function has several consequences on its materiality. All stories have in common the red background and the bright colours dispatched on the several registers that divide the painting. While some material features of these paintings are related to the performance's technicalities, others link to the audience / patrons. In describing the material features of the scroll in relation with its functions, I would like to approach the physical dimension of the object.

Records of performances showed that there are few similarities between the visual narratives of the scroll and the oral narration of the performers. The scenes depicted are principally there to help the storyteller remembering the story and to authenticate the narrative.[42] The narratives are divided into a series of registers. The registers help in dividing the whole composition into several small structures with potential breaks that the decorative border created.

Before the performance takes place, a priest among the storytellers will perform offerings and mantras to the god and hero on the scroll and both performers and audience are invited to worship. This single scene functions like a temple *murti* and the hero's appearance as a strikingly bigger figure than any other in the scroll (Fig. 3. 4), with large wide-opened eyes that allows the audience to exchange *darshan* in a comfortable way. This is the only moment when the scroll's regularly divided registers turn into bigger spaces, and when everyone shares the same religious and collective experience at the same time.

[41] On my fist meeting with Jagdish Mittal in December 2012, Laxman Aelay was also present at Mittal's home and introduced me to a small clip of the performances he was then recording.
[42] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 127.

Since the storytelling lasts several nights, it is necessary to allow these pauses in both visual and oral narratives. Because the performers know the story as well as the visual composition of the narrative on the scroll, they are capable of stopping the night's performance at an appropriate time to start the following day. For instance, at the time the caste's hero / founder is supposed to enter the story. The performer may stop for the night and resume the following day to keep this climax for the next day. The following night, the scroll would be unfolded on this special moment, on a special and bigger register where the single major figure will be depicted.[43]

Each registers contains different types of narrative methods. Vidya Dehejia discussed types of narration in Indian visual art and divided them into seven major categories.[44] The Cheriyal scrolls use numerous narrative tools with a recurrence of continuous narrative in which each register becomes the space of several episodes where the main protagonists is repeated. One may find sequential narratives too that subdivide the register into sequential scenes. Finally, monoscenic narratives are also frequent especially at times of depicting single deities standing alone. It is not rare either to see what Dehejia called narrative network where very little consideration is given to temporality and a seemingly arbitrary placement of the narrative elements.

In terms of colours, the red background is a common feature of all the scrolls, accompanied by bright colours for figures and decorative details in order to augment the heavy contrast. Red, yellow, green, and blue are the most commonly used colours, complemented with ochre, black and white. Colours are bold and without shading. The choice of colours may be understood with regards to the audience's necessities. Because the audience sit in front of the stage but some people may be rather far away from the scroll, they can only perceive highly contrasted scenes elements (Fig. 3. 3 and 3. 4). The contrast necessary to the audience balances the small and narrow registers that the performers require. So at the same time, the performers who narrate their story orally and the audience who listens, both get a visual support from the scroll.

[43] This paragraph summarises information found in Thangavelu, "Chapter 2 The ritual display of the painted scroll," *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India*, 117-188.
[44] Dehejia, Vidya. *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997.

Several details of the patrons' profession and affiliation will also be depicted regularly throughout the scroll. For instance, in the 1625 scroll for the Padmasali / weavers, one can see a great variety of different cloth patterns on the figures' dresses but also the king's pillows and curtains (Fig. 3. 5). In a scroll for the Goud / toddy tappers, there will be toddy trees depicted regularly on the scroll (Fig. 3. 6). In a scroll of the Chakkali / washermen, ball of washed or ready to be washed clothes will be depicted (Fig. 3. 7). These important motifs differentiate the narratives and personalise the visual story but may be invisible to the audience by their small size. They are not necessary to the performers. They are depicted as a signifier of the patron's presence. At the end of most of the narratives on a scroll, the last registers are dedicated to the members of the patrons' community presenting themselves to the king and receiving legitimation for their existence. Several scrolls have these episodes narrated in their last registers, especially those painted for the Kunapuli who narrate for the Padmasalis. I chose one example to illustrate such scene from the 1625 scroll (Fig. 3. 5). These episodes are also an important visual connection between the scroll and the patrons.

Evidently, not all the scenes of the entire Purana can be depicted and the choice of scenes is the reflection of complex negotiation between the performer's necessities and the painter's abilities to fit these necessities. Because a new scroll is painted after an old one, it is difficult to say how much each owes responsibility towards the overall organisation and depiction. Due to the function of the scroll, we can assume that performers have a heavier word on the narrative and painters on the style. There is very little chance to see a new narrative being commissioned and it is highly possible that scrolls have always been copied over time. One thing which is certain however is that when a new scroll is needed, performers come to the painters and while the painter sketches the narrative after the old scroll in front of the performer, the performer may add changes necessary to his telling. In contrast, the painter remains the guardian of the accuracy of the scroll, which I shall develop in the following chapter.

Surprisingly, the painter has little agency towards the painting materiality and takes no decision with regards to the organisation of the narrative directly. The only thing he can claim his own and that does not interfere with the performers' visual necessities is the technique, the materials and the style, especially the line that he uses to draw the

figures. Thangavelu in her research highlighted that for the painters, the most important element is the line, because it is what defines a good painter from a bad one.[45]

If this difference in the painters' hands may be of interest to the painters themselves and to art historians, it means little to the performers or patrons. Instead, both see religiosity and visual accuracy of the scroll as the painters' responsibility, therefore influencing his remuneration too. This accuracy should be understood in relation to the patrons' genealogies and measured by the fixity of the story that reflects on both the major events of the oral narration and those of the scroll. I develop the fixity in the scroll painting tradition in the following chapter.

Such paradoxes question the position of the painter in this tradition. In painting the scroll, he is the starting point and an indispensable character in the foundation and continuity of such tradition. Yet he has little involvement and responsibility towards the final look of the scroll. Recent changes in patronage - which I will look at length in the following chapter - reconfigured the status of the painters as craftsmen, and questioned the other two communities involved in the tradition as well.

f. **Changes in the tradition**

In a recent article by Chandan Bose[46], he has documented a performance of the Jambavanta Purana by the Dakkali for the Madiga that took place in 2000. For that performance, the performers used a printed copy of an already existing scroll instead of an original scroll on canvas (Fig. 3. 8). According to the performers, the print was cheaper and long lasting.[47] The other interesting observation in Bose's article is that the performance was much more theatrical that it used to be in the past and that we can see through recording done earlier in the 1990s. Here, performers wear heavy costumes, jewelleries and make up (Fig. 3. 9 and 3. 10); they interact with each other more sharply and move around on the stage too. This shows an important shift in the caste Purana performance tradition of the region, driven by several factors, which I shall enumerate at the present.

[45] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India,* 22.
[46] Bose, Chandan. "New Images for New Publics: Oral-Visual Narratives of the Telangana." Web blog post. *Material Religions*. 26 August 2015. [11/01/2016]
[47] Ibid.

The intervention of the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) into the scroll painting practice in the 1980s emphasised the importance of the painting object within the whole tradition. Because of this, the commission of paintings other than the scroll increased, therefore increasing the price of scrolls commissioned as well. This had two effects. The first one is that performers may no longer afford to commission a scroll, therefore going for the cheaper printed reproduction, taking up other activities or performing without a scroll. The second is that a few of the painters shifted to the bigger city Hyderabad in order to be closer to more financially rewarding orders from the handicraft market and private clients. Hyderabad is the state capital therefore the place where most of the handicraft outlets are located, but also the place where wealthier clients live or visit from abroad, therefore making the Cheriyal painting tradition more accessible to them. Vaikuntam and his family, as well as Madhu, live in Hyderabad and do not paint for the performers any more that turn to Nageshwar who stays in Cheriyal for that.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the loss of interest of the patrons' communities for these forms of entertainment and genealogies as well. Some of these communities have acquired greater wealth and have migrated to more urban settings. For instance, the weavers have almost entirely stopped commissioning performances. As a consequence to both painters and patrons' social evolution, the performers chose to extend their skills to more theatrical devices therefore targeting a broader audience and sustain their living from other various sources than the sole caste Puranas. As a consequence, the expansion of the theatrical dimensions of these performances reduced the painting to a secondary position, behind costumes and acting skills. The caste narratives remain a topical pretext for a theatrical show in the village. It is difficult and possibly inaccurate to see one of these three communities as initiators of these changes. Instead, they should be seen as interrelated in a cyclic manner so that effects in one particular aspect have consequences onto other sections of the tradition.

If the emphasis was not directly on the scroll as a painting in this section, it remains our major tool to understand the local society. Overall, the content of the scroll is privileged over the form and the visual features remain attached to functional necessities. The scroll does not only depict the genealogies of the patron caste but also offers the possibility to understand a particular social structure that involves three different communities in Telangana and the extent and limits of their interdependence. The case

of the flex print of the Jambavanta Purana offers a clear example of a dynamic response to social changes. It also illustrates the possible emancipation of these communities from each other, perhaps even resulting in their complete autonomy as the patrons become businessmen, the performers actors and the painters artists.

2. **Temple paintings**

Painting on the walls and ceiling of temple is known in several parts of India. In South India especially, there has been a long and rich tradition of temple paintings among the most famous are those of the Vijayanagara and later Nayaka periods. In contemporary Telangana, both rural and urban temples have paintings on their walls and / or ceiling. Vaikuntam, the eldest Cheriyal painter, explained that his father Venkatramaiah used to paint on temples too, and mentioned about a wooden gate at Vemulavada, from where he later moved to Cheriyal.[48] Vemulavada is a Pilgrimage site famous for the Raja Rajeshwara temple and its possible Western Chalukyan origin (c. 10th c. A. D.).[49] Temple paintings associated with the Cheriyal style cannot unfortunately be dated accurately but the well-known temple mural tradition of South India, coupled with Venkatramaiah's profession as a temple painter indicates that temple paintings have probably been part of the Cheriyal painters' activity even before. The following information is the result of notes, discussions, and short recordings of important information taken on a one-day field trip to these temples that took place on the 2nd of March 2014 with Rakesh Nakash.

The Cheriyal painters are in charge of the temples around the Cheriyal village that they can usually reach on their own vehicle for practical reasons of transporting the materials. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014, the Nakashi were involved with paintings in seven temples in Cheriyal or on the outskirts. Their attachment to these seven temples comes from practical reasons; but the painters are not limited to these seven temples and would consider commissions further away from Cheriyal. For these seven temples, the painters have painted the temple walls inside and outside and also produced the *murti* or other sculpted figures on the gates or inside the temple

[48] 10/02/2014 Discussion with Vaikntam Nakash.
[49] Ramesan, N. "Vemulavada" in *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962. 170-4.

compound. The walls of the temples are usually painted in one colour and then decorated with narrative scenes or images of deities. If tigers or any other pan-Indian deity guards the shrine, the painters would also make and paint them.

Depending on whether the temple is dedicated to the entire village or to one particular community, these paintings are produced on demand from the village chief or the head of the community for which the temple is built. They are usually decorated every two or three years, at time of festivals dedicated to the goddess hosted inside the temple. Dube in his study of Shamirpet,[50] and talking about the Maisamma festival observed that the ceremony is elaborated and performed at times of good crops. It required special preparation among them the painting of the temple walls and perhaps a new *murti* too.[51]

a. **Temple deities and local religious practice**

Temple	**Temple deity**	**Temple community**	**Location**
1 (Fig. 3. 11 to 3. 14)	Gadi Mysamma Maisamma	All village	Cheriyal
2 (Fig. 3. 15, 3. 16)	Yellamma	Gouds	Cheriyal
3 (Fig. 3. 17 to 3. 19)	Pedamma rides a tiger	Mudiraj Kaki Padagulu	Cheriyal
4 and 4bis (Fig. 3. 20 to 3. 22)	Mahankali (grand Durga) and Poshamma for Madigas	All village	Cheriyal
5 (Fig. 3. 23 to 3. 25)	Poshamma	All village	Cheriyal outskirts
6 (Fig. 3. 26 to 3. 28)	Renuka / Yellamma	Gouds	Cheriyal outskirts
7 (Fig. 3. 29 to 3. 32)	Yellamma	Gouds	Cheriyal outskirts
8 (Fig. 3. 33, 3. 34)	Mallanna / Mallikarjuna Swamy	Popular among Kuruma, Mudiraj, Yadava and other OBC	Indrakeeladri hill, in Komuravelli village Warangal

[50] Dube, S. C. *Indian Village*. Routledge & K.Paul, 1955.
[51] Ibid., 114.

These temples are usually small, square in format and quite rudimentary in their decoration. With the exception of the two bigger and newer Yellamma temples for the Goud (temple 6 and 7), and the Mallanna temple in Komuravelli (temple 8), each of these temples is a single shrine with a small front courtyard. None of these shrines are big enough to allow the devotee to enter it. They are made to protect the deity, and any act of worship takes place outside in front of the shrine. The Yellamma temples (6 and 7) comprise one main temple hosting the Yellamma deity and smaller adjacent shrines (Fig. 3. 26 and 3. 29). These two temples do not follow the format of the others and look fairly recent in comparison to the other five. For these two temples, the Cheriyal painters have only decorated the outer walls of the temple with painting of the Goud's activity (Fig. 3. 28, 3. 31, and 3. 32). In the temple (7), the paintings are not on the temple itself but on the walls of a small hall adjacent to the temple (Fig. 3. 31, and 3. 32). At Komuravelli, the *murti* has been made and painted by Venkatramaiah, Vaikuntam's father. I could not photograph the statue directly but put a photo of a poster print of it instead (Fig. 3. 34). Apart from these three 'exceptions,' each other shrine follows similar shapes and decoration.

These temples, along with the scroll which I introduced earlier, are important documents for understanding the local religious practice. The goddess worshipped in Cheriyal are Maisamma, Mahankali, Peddamma, Poshamma, Yellamma / Renuka among possible other local or brahmanical deities. Dube, about Shamirpet,[52] which is seventy kilometres away from Cheriyal, also mentions the worship of Maisamma, Poshamma, Mahankali, and Yellamma, along with other major gods like Rama and Hanuman. This indicates the presence of these particular goddesses in several parts of the Telangana region.

Among the temples painted by the Nakashis, none is dedicated to a pan-Indian brahmanical deity. At times, a small statue of Shiva or a painting of Shiva and Parvati may be seen but only to complement the local *Shakti* or goddess cult. Most of the goddesses ride tigers and are also known as the seven sisters. These sister goddesses usually guards villages and protect its inhabitants from diseases. They also insure the good health and fertility of human, animals and crops.[53]

[52] Ibid., 93-96.
[53] Flueckiger, *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess*. 6.

The temples of Gadi Maisamma and Mahankali are dedicated to the entire village and located in a rather central position within it. Apart from these, the Goud have three temples of Yellamma/Renuka dedicated to their community, the two in the outskirt that I presented above, next to their working field (temple 6 and 7), and another more centrally located (temple 2). The Mudiraj and their attached castes of performers the Kaki Padagalu have a temple dedicated to Peddamma (temple 3). Finally, a much bigger temple in a neighbouring village called Komuravelli is dedicated to Mallanna and Mallikarjuna Swamy and popular among backward castes of the region. The Poshamma temple (temple 5) is for the entire village but located in the outskirts. According to Whitehead, Poshamma protects the boundaries of the village,[54] whereas Dube identified Maisamma as the boundary goddess.[55]

Even though the temples are dedicated to a particular community, according to Rakesh Nakash, it is not forbidden for other communities to visit. "They all visit each other castes temples, because they are all sisters."[56] As I enquired a bit more, I understood that "they all" meant only the backward (OBC) castes, to which most of the patron / performers pair belongs. As Rakesh added later "no general castes have goddesses" which means that in practice, no upper castes actually come and visit these temples. Similarly with the Dalits (SC), here the Madigas, Rakesh pointed a small temple next to Mahankali Temple (temple 4bis, Fig. 3. 22) dedicated only to their community, and it is unclear whether they really are allowed to enter others' temples around. As drummers however, they do take part in festivals as priests who can perform animal sacrifices.

This underlying social structure of the religious activity in Cheriyal is analogous to that of the performance tradition presented earlier. Like the temple, none of the performances is dedicated to a higher caste but they try to maintain the status of backward castes. The Madiga also have their own performance tradition, performed by the Dakkali, both considered as scheduled castes. Few of these temples are dedicated to communities who also happen to be those commissioning or performing the caste narratives. For instance, the Goud have three temples painted by Cheriyal painter and a

[54] Whitehead, H. 1853-1947. *The Village Gods of South India*. 2nd ed. Calcutta: London: Association Press, 1921. 24.
[55] Dube. *Indian Village.* 95.
[56] 02/03/2014 Discussion with Rakesh

scroll as well. The Mudiraj and their associated performing bard the Kakipadagalu too, order temple and scroll painting to the Nakashis.

The painting practice remains confined within lower caste communities around Cheriyal and in Telangana. They are produced by the Nakashi artisans, themselves a backward caste (OBC), for other backward caste performers and patrons, whether their paintings are to be made on scroll or temples. Painting is part of local performances, entertainment, festivals and religious events, all participating in an organic function of the low caste society. The connection between different communities and their relation is not exactly something surprising here but it is the importance of painting and its role within these relations that the Cheriyal paintings propose. Moreover, because Cheriyal painters work on scrolls, wooden figurines, temple walls and temple statues in the region, it contributes to a certain visual homogeneity of the region. Most of the major traits of the scroll painting can be found on temple walls as well, while most of the temple deities could very well be bigger version of the wooden figurines used by the Kunapuli.

b. **The paintings**

The common feature of all the painted elements of these temples is their bright colour palette. Whether it is the background colour of the walls or the procession of devotees that ornament them, as well as any sculpted figure and the temple *murti*, all are brightly painted.

Overall, both scrolls and paintings on wall depict characters in sequence, following each other as disposed within a register. These registers are clearly marked by decorative borders in the scrolls and by the architectural elements on which they are painted for the temples. For instance, the outer wall of temple (6) is narrow and the painting fit the height of the wall (Fig. 3. 28). Similarly, the paintings on the adjacent hall of the temple (7) depict scenes on the available portion of wall, between the roof and the open (Fig. 3. 31 and 3. 32). At times too, the registers are clearly created as with the Poshamma temple (5) where the walls have been divided into three bands, each with a different colour and the top one was decorated with figures in lines. Each of these temples chose very bright colour and contrasting decorations, which takes part of the local visual

landscape as well. Figures on the scrolls and on temple walls are all depicted in the same style, mostly in side-view, engaged into some activity represented with sharp gestures and bold postures, the contours and black eyes reinforced by the black line.

In terms of iconography, the function of the scrolls points to a great variety of narrative scenes whereas the temple paintings mostly relate to the temple worship or the activities of the community for which it is dedicated. However, these painting remain usually generic and do not particularly points towards the deity that is inside the shrine but instead towards the communities for which it is tutelary. Most of the scrolls will have depiction of devotee procession or the professional activities of the patron caste as we can see on temple walls. The temples' walls however do not participate in the narrative of these patrons therefore do not require depicting their genealogies.

Temples (1), (3) and (5) are all dedicated to the entire village, although temple (3) is more popular among the Mudiraj and their dependent performing caste the Kakipadigela. For this reason, the paintings on the outer temple walls depict general procession of devotee without any indication on particular community. Instead, they depict general ritual activities in relation to the goddess worship. Villagers are depicted in procession, forming a frieze along the three temple walls. The walls are not entirely covers by the painting but instead, it follows a stripe, reminding the registered division of the scrolls. These processions depict both male and female devotees, all carrying some offerings and performing ritual activity. Looking at these paintings can help identifying the rituals practices at times of festivals for the particular temple. Female devotees usually carry a decorated pot of rice on their head, called *bonalu*, in which they cook rice to offer the goddess. Another common offering depicted on the temple wall is the neem leaf. Male devotees are mostly occupied with ritual activities rather than offering. A few of them carry a goat to be sacrificed, engaged in wrestling, or are playing drums of different sorts. Children also take part of these depicted processions.

Temples (2), (6) and (7) are all dedicated to Yellamma, the patron goddess of the Goud community of toddy tappers. Apart from temple (2), temple (6) and (7) are comparatively big and have several shrines within their compound, as well as statues standing in the courtyard (Fig. 3. 26 and 3. 29). All have in common the depiction of the Goud community's activities on their walls. Because temple (2) is smaller than the other two, the paintings are laid on the front wall (Fig. 3. 15). They depict the Goud's activity

as well as a procession of devotee, divided into two imaginary registers and into left and right. The register with the activity depicts on the left two toddy trees, one with a worker extracting the toddy from the tree and the other two drinking it. Below, there is a procession of devotee leading towards the gate of the shrine where the goddess Yellamma is seating. The other two temples for the Goud show similar patterns, the activities of the Goud as toddy tapper and the following procession of devotee towards the temple. These illustrations are quite literal and reflect the professional and religious activities of the community.

c. **A visual language for Cheriyal and its community**

To conclude on the connection between the performance practice and the temple painting, I would like to concentrate on the temple statue. The Cheriyal painters do not only paint these statues, they also make them. Traditionally, it used to be made through a lengthy process called *mitti* (clay). Snakes eat and digest this clay during the rainy season, which makes it very fine. It is then mixed with an egg and churn for a very long time.[57] Nowadays, they are all made in cement as it is more resistant and therefore does not need to be made again for a long time. The small shrine for the Madiga next to the Mahankali temple is the only one that still has a clay statue, made by Venkatramaiah (Temple 4bis, Fig. 3. 22).[58] The Madiga are usually poorer than their communities and probably could not afford to commission another statue, which makes it the only one remaining in this technique in Cheriyal.

These statues all look quite similar in style and in their attributes. All have rather square faces, wearing patterned sarees that the most recent scrolls too. They are painted in bright-saturated colours and varnished to give them a shiny look. They all share the same attributes, the tiger on which they ride, the trident, and the drum. Masks of *rakshas* (demons) are at their feet and a male and female figure respectively occupies their right and left. They all sit in front of a blue panel decorated of star patterns and bordered in the style of the scrolls too. There are striking similarities between these

[57] 02/03/2014, record of a discussion with Rakesh Nakash as we visited the temples in Cheriyal "This clay is a specific one. In the rainy season, snakes eat some soil and leave some clay behind. This clay is supremely fine and without any anomalies. The temple was built with that clay. They would gather this clay from all the places and put it in a bucket and mix an egg with it and mix it for long time."
[58] 02/03/2014 same discussion as above "My grandfather built this one last. No one uses this process anymore. It's a lengthy process. It requires mixing for a long time. This goddess statue is made of that. Other new ones are made of cement."

deities inside the local temples and the wooden figurines made by the painters for the Kunapuli performance of the Katam Raju. I will be talking about these figurines a bit later in the next chapter but it is important to notice here the connection between the objects made and painted for temples and those for performances. The one for performances are made in wood and clay, identically painted with the same bright colour palette and glossy finish. The only major difference is their lighter weight and smaller sized, as if they were smaller version of temple idols. But all are manifestation of the Cheriyal painters' visual language.

The analogies between the scroll and the temple wall paintings and between the temple *murti* and the wooden figurines raise the question of origin of these painting activities. As I encountered the scrolls first, I initially thought that temple paintings were only a transposition of the same style on to other necessities. But the observation of the temple statues along with the Kunapuli figurines could suggest the other way around. Perhaps the striking style of the scrolls and figurines for performances would have been influenced by the almost ever-lasting tradition of temple paintings in India, with its own regional particularities in Cheriyal. Two elements however oriented me towards the first option on the scroll influencing the temple paintings. The temple wall painting iconography seems to favour community related or generic religious theme rather than specific element that relate to the story or worship of the goddess. This could indicate that temple paintings may contribute to the maintenance of the communities' religious position in addition to the scroll. Perhaps too, the fact that village goddesses did not always have concrete built temples but shrines attached to trees or on the side of roads could indicate a later addition and possibly brahmanical emulation of the painting on temple in the region. This is of course speculative and demands further research.

Either way, painting is a very important feature of the locality, meaningful to the communities' activities but also creating a particular visual identity for this region that reflects on the scrolls, the temple walls, the small figurines and the temple idols. The relative homogeneity of these paintings along with the particular segments of the local society they interact with also opens a broader understanding of these low caste communities of Telangana. These are quite clearly isolated, religiously and socially, from other higher castes that do not partake in any similar painting commission on scroll or temple but instead, may commission a pan-Indian narrative such as the Ramayana for their home decorations The painters, performers, and patrons' role and

interactions are ruled by a strict system of interrelation where everyone plays his role. In this context, Cheriyal paintings must be looked at as a visual language for these communities and as an organic part of the evolution of this structure as well, which is what I will explore further in questioning the fixity and the dynamism of this local painting tradition.

Chapter IV

Degree of change in the painting for the performance tradition

In this chapter, I would like to approach the question of change in the Cheriyal paintings for performances. The paintings on temple walls are painted regularly over the earlier ones and unless photographed at different times, it is impossible to observe the pictorial evolution. The scrolls and figurines used during performances have however been collected and archived, which allows greater comparison. I would like to question the evolution of the painting tradition in looking at two different case studies, the scrolls of the Markandeya Purana / Bhavana Rishi painted for the Kunapuli and the various supports of the Katam Raju Katha produced for the Mandaheccu. The former shows incremental changes over time whereas the latter more obvious transformations. The idea is to define the nature and necessity of the changes taking place in the painting practice, and to interrogate their compatibility with the overall tradition. In this section, the focus is on the material and pictorial features of the object and what it has to tell about the evolution of the Cheriyal painting tradition. All the examples presented here have been collected from museums and private collections but they were all previously in circulation for the performances or made identical to those in circulation.

1. Incremental changes: The Padmasali Purana

For the first case study, I chose to explore the degree of change in the visual narrative of the Padmasali scrolls, painted for the performance of the weaver caste genealogies. This narrative is also known as the Markandeya or Bhavana Rishi Purana but actually includes only few elements of these stories which I shall mention in a moment. Although the “Markandeya” or “Bhavana Rishi Purana” is more meaningful to the Padmasali due to its puranic affiliation and the authoritative nature of the literary genre, I chose to call it the Padmasali Purana to highlight the direct reference to the community for which the story is depicted and narrated. The Kunapuli community performed the narrative. The scrolls of the Padmasali story have been the most extensively collected over time but due to the contemporary decline in patronage, they are now virtually

absent from circulation.[1] The oldest scroll is from 1625 (A) and the most recent form c. 2000 (F).

I chose to compare five full scrolls of the story along with a few fragments and to offer small nuances on the dating of few of these scrolls on the basis of stylistic observations. The first three scrolls come from Jagdish and Kamla Mittal collection, (A), (B) and (D) (acc. no. respectively 76.469/471/470). I also chose to look at one of the scrolls from the British Museum (C) (0615,0.1) and one more exhibited in the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) in Bhopal (F); all in full to compare the overall iconography and materiality. To support these comparisons, I will be using one section of a Markandeya Purana scroll exhibited in the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad (E) (acc. no. 87-9). I will not go through the scrolls entirely but I would like to concentrate on the major features of the objects and primarily on the ways each of the scrolls transcribes the narrative and how they connect to each other. To identify the scenes in my observations, I relied on Dallapiccola's description of the Markandeya Purana scroll from the British Museum, as well as Mittal's short summary of the narrative and my personal assessment from the collection of different versions I enumerated above.

a. **The narrative**

Without a record of the performance, it is impossible to know with exactitude every episode of the narrative, as depicted on the scroll and as narrated by the storytellers. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, the episodes on the scroll do not necessarily follow the storytelling; it serves as an aide-memoire and as an authenticating document that does not strictly illustrate the oral narrative. The painted narrative is selective of the most important events or those that need a reminder for the performance. For this reason, it is difficult to be accurate in describing the full narrative as performed for the Padmasalis. Dallapiccola in *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* [2] described two scrolls of the Markandeya Purana from the British Museum collection. She proposes an identification of each register of the scrolls and an overall summary of the Markandeya Purana narrative as summarised

[1] Sadanandam *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 92.
[2] British Museum and Dallapiccola. *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*.

by Thurston and Rangachari in 1909 *Castes and Tribes of Southern India.*[3] I will try to summarise the story in synthesising these together with Sadanandam' own summary of the Bhavana Rishi story.[4]

The story recited by the Kunapuli for the Padmasali is that of Bhavana Rishi, the direct founder of the community. The legend of the Padmasali is also associated to that of the sage Markandeya and is often referred to as the Markandeya Purana even if it takes into its narratives only a few elements of it. The genealogy goes as followed: The sage Bhrigu was born to Brahma. Mrukanda was born to Bhrigu. Because Mrukanda was not given a son, he prayed to Shiva who offered two propositions to Mrukanda. The first one was to have a pious son who would die at 16 and the second to have an evil one who would live longer. Mrukanda chose the former and got a child named Markandeya. At the age of sixteen, Yamadharma Raja, the god of death came to take Markandeya away. Mrukanda prayed Shiva to save his son and after Shiva battled with Yama, Markandeya was saved. As an exchange for saving his life, Shiva ordered Markandeya to perform a sacrifice and from the sacrificial fire, Bhavana Rishi, the weaver of the Gods appeared. Bhavana Rishi would make clothes for the gods with the thread obtained from the lotus situated at Vishnu's navel. An alternative version of the story supported by both J. Mittal and Thurston and Rangachari believes that Markandeya himself was asked to weave for the gods and that he did *tapas* (penance) to achieve this, from which Bhavana rishi appeared. The major difference here is that the connection to weaving comes from Bhavana Rishi in the first and directly from Markandeya in the second and the hesitation lies in whether the sacrifice was performed directly because Markandeya's life was saved or because he was asked to weave in exchange for his life. The second version seems to go one step further in justifying the existence of Markandeya and its connection to the weaving activity, mediated through the appearance of Bhavana rishi. After this, Bhavana rishi made clothes for the gods and offered it to them. He offered one to Bhairava, the 'angry' manifestation of Shiva who deemed the cloth unsuitable and refused to accept it. As a consequence, Bhairava uttered a curse that the clothes should wear out in six months. Along Bhairava's demand, Shiva ordered Bhavana Rishi to provide him with a tiger's skin to wear. At this stage, another sage named Narada comes to help Bhavana and tell him to go to Udaigiri

[3] Thurston, Edgar, and K. Rangachari. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. Madras: Government Press, 1909.
[4] Sadanandam *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 92.

where Bhadravati, Surya's daughter is doing penance to secure Bhavana as her husband. She promised to give him a tiger's skin if he marries her. Bhavana therefore goes to the forest where Bhadravati stays. Bhadravati provide Bhavana with a tiger. Bhavana used the tiger as his vehicle and proceeded to meet Shiva. On his way, he meets with a Raksha called Kaluva, who came from the Vishalaksha city and had stolen Bhavana's loom to make clothes in jute for the Rakshas. Bhavana could not succeed in killing Kaluva and called for the help of an army of tigers called Pulisainyam. With their help, he could kill Kaluva. An alternative version says that from the sweat that Bhavana was producing while fighting the Raksha, three people emerged, Adigadu, Padigadu and Baladu, the founder of the Kunapuli community. In any case, the Kunapuli came in support of Bhavana and Bhavana could finally kill Kaluva with their help. As a gift for their help, Bhavana offered a boon to the Kunapuli that they would earn their livelihood by performing the Bhavana Rishi before the weavers / Padmasalis. Bhavana finally reached Shiva and offered him the tiger's skin. He then goes back to Bhadravati, marries her, and has a hundred and one sons. There are said to be one hundred ancestors of the Padmasalis and the remaining one son is the ancestor of the silk weavers.

All the scrolls start with the same section of six registers for (A), eight for (B and C) and nine for (D), that introduce the narrative the worship of Ganesha and Vishnu and the appearance of Bhavana Rishi, from Markandeya and himself from Mrukanda. This section, which is usually more than one third of the scrolls, places Bhavana Rishi within the more classical narrative of the Markandeya Purana. Once Bhavana's existence is presented, the scroll starts depicting his story and relation with the gods and how he came to be the founding figure of the Padmasalis. Finally, the last three to four registers which starts at the depiction of goddess Gangamma, directly speaks about the ancestors of the Padmasalis, sons of Bhavana, and how they established their came to present in front of the local king, asking for their status or for resolution of their possible conflict in status. In a general fashion, the scrolls of the Padmasalis are therefore divided into three sections: The Markandeya Purana, the Bhavana Rishi story and the Padmasalis (See diagrams).

b. **Stylistic dating of the scrolls**

A few scrolls bear inscriptions of their transfer of ownership but very rarely a date of production. The only means for dating these scrolls is in a) speculating upon the life of a scroll before it is transferred from one performing troop to another b) the number of possible transfers and c) a detailed examination of stylistic evolution. The first thing to note is that a transfer of ownership of the scroll does not imply only a transfer of the object but also a transfer or a division of the *mirasi* (right and responsibility) associated with the performing group who is handing the scroll down to another. The *mirasi* are the number and names of villages that one performing group is allowed to visit in order to meet his patrons.[5] At times, like with the oldest scroll (A) for instance, the inscription has been written over another, which makes it really difficult to speculate on a date of production.

Drawing from Thangavelu's information on the system of inheritance, a scroll is usually transferred either when a father is too old or when a son comes of age for performing.[6] This still does not give us sufficient indication on whether the scroll was produced by the father or the son and earlier or later in life. The second uncertainty comes from the possibility that an uncle or other family member may have transferred their scroll as they decide to order a new scroll while theirs is still usable or stop the profession altogether. Perhaps too, communities outside the performing caste may wish to take up the profession and acquire a scroll from another who wishes to stop. This wide range of possibilities has not been explored and deserves attention before making any assumption on the dating of these scrolls. The best we can do here is to assume the date of production of the scroll up to one generation before the inscription on it. The inscription on the first scroll (A) indicates 1644 as the transfer of ownership and Mittal proposed to date it to 1625, which we have seen in Chapter 2 seems reasonable to agree.

Another of Mittal's scrolls (B) had been dated around 1790-1800 on the basis of style, which would make it the fourth oldest scroll of the Markandeya Purana. The last of Mittal's scrolls (D) bears an inscription as well, this time with the date 1864.[7] This time,

[5] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 157.
[6] Thangavelu. *The Painted Puranas of Telangana: A Study of a Scroll Painting Tradition in South India.*91-7.
[7] "Salutations to Ganadhipati (Lord of the Ganas = Ganeshaa) In the year Bahudhatunama, in the month Ashvayuga, on the first day of Chandramana Chaitra. Shuddha Padyami (i. e. Ugadi) = Monday, 11 April 1864. Somesvara Basa Simhakarana….. Nirmala Parigena. Brave-hear administrator Jaggarao, village

it does not attest to a transfer of ownership but instead of donations to be taken from the Padmasali at the birth of children among their dependent caste, the Kunapulis. Mittal chose to date the scroll of 1775-90, which is ninety to one hundred years before the inscription, probably due to the state of preservation but this has not been confirmed. One of the two scrolls of the Markandeya Purana at the British Museum (C) has a transfer of ownership date of 1807-8, which again, assuming it has been circulating for around twenty-five years of circulation with the previous generation, dates the scroll back to c. 1780. The last scroll that I used for my observation was painted recently and does not carry an inscription with the date but the Vaikuntam confirmed it was painted in the 2000s (F). Finally, the fragments available in publication of another scroll at the British Museum (6) and one at the Salar Jung Museum (E), for which I was not able to obtain the full image, therefore not allowing comparison of the narrative, length and other factors that may influence a stylistic dating. Several observations on the four full scrolls, three from Mittal's collection and the dated one from the British Museum led me to nuance this initial dating, which I shall explain now.

The scroll (C) and (D) show strong similarities in the organisation of the pictorial surface, the style, and the iconography. These two scrolls develop the narrative on respectively 26 and 27 registers, devoting eight and nine registers to the first section, which I identified as the worship of Ganesha, the myth of creation, and the Markandeya Purana. It stops when Bhavana rishi enters the story (C reg. 9 and D reg. 10).

In both these scrolls, the marriage of Bhadravati and Bhavana (C reg. 21) and (D reg. 23) is depicted in a similar manner with an elephant on the left and a horse on the right. Similarly, the two scrolls have a blue band register itself bordered from the top and bottom by a yellow floral border as their first register. The couple of scenes when Bhavana enters the forest are also interesting in this regard. It is composed of one scene when Bhavana enters the forest and sees animals, trees, fruit gatherers etc. and an elaborate depiction of the Gandaberunda, a two-headed magical bird widely used in South Indian Hindu iconography (C reg. 16) and (D reg. 18); followed by the meeting with Bhadravati standing in joints hands and flanked with her servants (C reg. 17 and D

Alapura Kanatalay. In Kaliyuga, we hundred families of Kunapulis, the alm-seekers from the *Padmasali*s, under their patronage. Whenever there is an occasion, for a male-child, se should be given one rupee, a piece of cloth and a dry coconut, and in case of a girl-child, half-a-rupee, a piece of cloth and a dry coconut. If given, they will get blessings from us, otherwise they will get a curse. Signed by several witnesses (right side)" Mittal. *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 48.

reg. 19). In both these scrolls, the figures and elements of the composition may vary in colour but are disposed in exactly the same manner. The number of characters, trees and animal figure is exactly the same. The placement of mirrors and other small object or even gesture is also identical.

These similar observations come in contrast with the scroll (B), which shared stylistic features with those two but major differences as well. Scroll (B) develops the narrative into 24 registers with eight for the Markandeya Purana section which is equal to the other two (C and D).

The marriage procession is depicted in a very similar style but this time, the elephant is on the left and the horse on the right (B reg. 20). In the couple of scenes for the Gandaberunda and the meeting with Bhadravati, the organisation is again different. The Gandaberunda (B reg. 15) is at the centre but this time, Bhavana enters the registers from the right whereas he entered from the left in the other two. There is a larger number of figures in that scenes too, busy with forest activities such as fetching fruits, haunting etc. A group of animal is depicted on the left, which wasn't seen in the other two scrolls. As for the scene where Bhavana meets Bhadravati (B reg. 16), the disposition is reversed here too, Bhavana enters from the left instead of the right and meets with the fierce animal while Shiva and Parvati are riding above is standing on the right instead of the left. Finally, in the scrolls (C) and (D), these two scenes of Bhavana in the forest are directly followed by the main scene where Bhavana rides the tiger and fight the demon's army (C reg. 18 and D reg. 20), whereas the scroll (B) integrated another scene before, difficult to identify where women seems to be talking to demons while a bunch of men dressed in courtly attire of the Deccan fashion are playing instrument and seem to be indulged in celebrations (B reg. 17). This scene can be equated in the other two scrolls as well, but after Bhavana riding the tigers, instead of before.

Other differences may be found elsewhere but this is enough to question the date and style of these scrolls with regards to each other. Evidently, the scroll (C) and (D) are very similar and share several features that allow their association. In contrast, the differences in scroll (B) cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, the finesse of these scrolls and the overall style makes it quite difficult to propose an accurate chronology. I propose two hypotheses here. Scroll (C) has an earlier inscription than scroll (D) although both

indicate a date around the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and show greater similarities. Scroll (B) bears no inscription but on the basis of fewer registers and being overall finer than the other two, one could suggest an earlier date than the scroll (C) and (D), perhaps more towards the middle or the end of the eighteenth. Scroll (B) and (C) both have the arches of the temples under which the trimurti (Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu) is seated, painted in indigo. This is not seen in the scroll (D). On the basis of these modest stylistic observations, I argue that the four scrolls may be dated as followed: (A) ca. 1625, (B) ca. 1750-80, (C) c. 1770-1800 and (D) c.1780-1820.

The second hypothesis for explaining stylistic variations and that seems more convincing, does not relate to a different date but a different painting centre. Similarities in length and support as well as colours between scroll (B), (C), and (D) makes it possible to link them by their technique but not in style which may suggest that it was produced somewhere else and not in direct contact or not copied from each other, but nevertheless around the same time.

A similar situation occurs with the scroll exhibited at the Salar Jung museum (E) for which I have only the first fragment. If the first section follows the sequence of all the scrolls mentioned above, the depiction of Vishnu in his first appearance within the 'Markandeya section,' is particularly intriguing. Vishnu's depiction in the scroll of the Padmasali usually follows that of Ganesha and occupies the second or third register. At this location, Vishnu is represented as lying on a banyan leaf with a lotus flower coming out of his navel in which Brahma is depicted. Shri Devi and Bhu Devi are at his feet, probably Hanuman on his left and Garuda on his right. Under the banyan leaf, there is a white waterscape with elephant and tortoise. This rough description is what one finds in each of the scroll of the Padmasali for the first of Vishnu's appearance. In the Salar Jung scroll however, it is the only scroll where one sees Vishnu in the same iconography but depicted in frontal position rather than in profile.

As I hinted at in Chapter 2, there are only few figures depicted frontally in the scroll painting of the 1625 Padmasali Purana. This is further observed in all the other scrolls I presented above but it is rather puzzling to see that there is no consistency apart from the depiction of the local goddesses, probably Gangamma that is regularly depicted frontally within the narratives. The trimurti are depicted alternatively in frontal view

and profile, sometimes both in the same scroll. However, Vishnu on the banyan leaf is systematically depicted in profile and so is the later Vishnu relying on Shesha (E reg. 2).

The depiction of Vishnu in frontal view in the Salar Jung Museum scroll also suggest the possibility of another painting centre that does not follow the same conventions as in Telangana from where most of the inscribed scrolls have been located (A, C, and D). The frontal depiction as well as the round face and bold eyes might indicate a further south provenance where these stylistic elements may be seen on the temple hangings from coastal Andhra Pradesh from the seventeenth century onwards but also at Lepakshi (c. 1530) where the ceiling depicts a frontal Shiva in the outer mandapa and a frontal Virabhadra in the inner. My supposition is that the Salar Jung museum scroll (E) might have been produced further south in Andhra Pradesh rather than Telangana. Unfortunately I do not possess the full image of the scroll to allow further comparison but the overall style is definitely different.

c. **Continuity**

While observing the available scrolls of the same narratives but from different dates or different regions, the first impression is a strong sense of continuity, perhaps even conservatism. While the Madel Purana may be found depicted either horizontally or vertically, the Markandeya Purana is always depicted in vertical format and the scenes vary only a little. The variation in length is rather minor and between the oldest scroll from 1625 (A) that measures 845 centimetres, and the latest from 2000 (F) that measures 915 centimetres, there is less than a metre difference. The width varies only a little too and does not increase over time but rather fluctuates between 85 and 91 centimetres. It is worth noting at this point too that an increase of registers over time that does not necessarily mean an increase in the number of scenes but instead, a grander subdivision of the narrative space.

The overall arrangement of the painting surface is the same for all. The narrative is divided into registers; themselves divided into scenes. Several continuous narratives may be depicted in one register without any border to separate them. All the scrolls of the Padmasali Purana start with a painting of Ganesha, seating in *lalitasana* or half meditation pose, on a throne, with the bandicoot at his feet. He is flanked with one

devotee on each side. With the exception of the scroll (B) and scroll (F), all follow with an image of Vishnu, reclining on a leaf with Sri Devi and Bhu Devi at his feet. From his navel, a lotus flower emerges with Brahma inside. Seven rishis are depicted from the leaves sprouting from Vishnu's banyan leaf: Kashyapa, Atri, Vasishtha, Vishvamitra, Gautama, Jamadagni and Bharadvaja.[8] Underneath Vishnu's leaf, all have a white waterscape with fishes, elephant and Kurma, the tortoise avatar of Vishnu. It probably refers to the *Samudra Manthan* episode, the Churning of the Ocean of Milk and the myth of creation in Hinduism.

The frontal image of Ganesha and the scene with Vishnu and the Myth of creation are rather fixed and reproduced at the beginning of each scroll of the Padmasali. This section of the scroll will not be used within the narrative directly by the storytelling performance but rather as an introductory phase to it, a moment of worship for the audience and the performers before the beginning of the narrative. Because of their religious importance, these two registers take a fair amount of space in the overall scroll. Similarly, every event of importance in the narrative will take a larger register to be depicted. For instance, Bhavana Rishi riding the tigers and fighting the demons is one of them and to be found in all the scrolls.

Among other features that are common to all the scrolls are the use of bright red for the background and the use of contrasting blues and ochre / yellows for the figures. Apart from the variation in pigment quality and technique, all the scrolls without exception use this conventional formula of red background and contrasted coloured figures. In complement, borders will be white or yellow, decorated with floral motifs and contrasting with the red background as well. As a general rule, the figures do not exceed the registers in which they have been assigned, with the exception of few crowns.

The particularities expressed above highlight two important facts about the scroll painting tradition. The first one is the noticeable inflexibility of the scroll painting tradition, and the necessity of such constancy. All share a similar narrative in a similar order i. e. the Markandeya Purana, the Bhavana Rishi and the Padmasali Purana. Even when scenes are swapped and reversed like for the one where men played instruments, it will be found elsewhere. There is very little chance not to find a scene in a scroll at

[8] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 228.

all. At times, a register may include scenes that will be seen in three different registers in another scroll yet all the scenes are depicted in all the scrolls. This is easy to compare with the scroll (B), (C), and (D) which all come from around the same period between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The earlier scroll (A) has greater difference although major scenes of the Puranas are found there too. Similarly, the latest scroll (F) gathers all the important scenes as well.

d. **Reproduction**

When a new scroll is being commissioned, whether it is because the previous one is too old or because a new family is starting the activity, the performers visit the painters' house with the old scroll and request for a new one. The old scroll will serve as a model to sketch the narrative onto the new canvas cloth. This usually takes place with the presence of the performers themselves who may add or remove scenes and elements while the painters are copying the narrative from the previous one. This takes a few days to complete and the performers can then go away and give a few months to the painter to complete the narrative.

Many a times, painters reminded me that they do not know the performers' stories, at least not in detail; neither do they wish or need to. Because they copy from the previous one, it is neither usual nor necessary for the painters to collect and to know the stories. Vaikuntam, who is now the eldest painter of the Cheriyal tradition, accumulated a few sketches of the figures that he should remember or that may be peculiar to one particular scroll in a small-sized sketchbook and remembers major elements of each narrative that he has painted on several occasions. But this does not by any means equate to the performers' knowledge of the story. This is very important to understand the painter's impact on the material and pictorial features of the scroll. Both painters and performers believe one scroll is a copy of the previous. This is mostly due to the fact that the narrative does not and should not be changed in order to keep its authenticating function but also to be practical for the performers. We can see a comparison with the *phad* paintings from Rajasthan that I introduced in Chapter 2 here, where Kavita Singh explains that the making of a new painting is referred to as "*chhapna"* (printing).[9] Here too, performers consider a new painting as only a copy of the previous one as it were.

[9] Singh Kavita, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan," 117.

The example of Chandan Bose's article about the printed reproduction from 2013 I explained in conclusion of the previous chapter also emphasised this understanding of a new scroll as a reproduction of the previous one.

There is one particular way to understand reproduction here. As one look at the scrolls over time, there are numerous constant features but there are numerous changes in style and materiality too. However the changes that occur over time mostly relate to the overall look of the scroll, to its visual features whereas the narratives tend to remain the same. With the exception of few figures and alteration in the placement of scenes, the episodes of the narrative are rather constant. In the style however, the quality of pigments changed over time, so did the quality of the canvas, but also depending on who is drawing the black line, there may be a different fluidity in the figures. As we saw in Chapter 2 as well, the composition over time tent to become more crowded due to the addition of ornaments, architectural elements and to the reduction in size of each register. But these are only elements that do not alter the narrative and the episodes of the narrative.

It is important to note that it is not the painting which is fixed and conservative but rather the function of the narratives depicted on the paintings which demands such visual fixity. The genealogies serve a legitimisation purpose and this legitimisation is conveyed through a performance that uses the scrolls as its background for two reasons: to help the storytellers in their performance and to assert the authenticity of the narrative they perform. This consequential structure demands a certain visual fixity to serve both these functions. As long as the narrative is not altered, stylistic changes are not a concern and the painting remains a reproductions of another.

e. **Incremental changes**

This takes me to the second point, which is that each scroll displays a small degree of variation in the order or the number of registers or the disposition of figures. A closer look at the scrolls together nuances this consistency in the scroll depiction. These changes do not occur drastically from one scroll to the next copy but instead, over time, through slow and incremental additions.

For instance it seems that over time, the narratives tend to expand rather than being reduced. The scroll (A) depicts the narrative on twenty-two registers. In between, scroll (B) contains twenty-five registers and scroll (C) and (D) both contain twenty-seven registers. The latest scroll from 2000 (F) contains twenty registers. Most of the scenes are the same for all the scrolls but the division in most recent scrolls tend to subdivide scenes rather than joining several scenes into one register, which is partly the reason for the elongation of the scroll. This observation on the number of registers reinforces the possible dating that I presented earlier.

Another observation may be made about the costumes. In the oldest scroll (A), the men's costumes was a bare chest and a patterned dhoti, leaving the Deccani *jama* coat to the sole wear of the king on the final register. In the later scrolls, the Deccani fashion through the *jama* coat became more popular and could be seen on the king and the noblemen as well, unlike in 1625. As I explained earlier, these changes do not alter the narrative in any sort of way and do not hamper the performers' necessities. Perhaps too, these may be welcome as a contemporisation of their performance through an adaptation of its visual form to the most recent fashion.

Other changes occur in elements of decoration and ornaments, as well as in the borders and naturalism of the figures. All these are stylistic features that do not change the fixity of the narrative's iconography and that may evolve over time. For instance, the borders that separated registers in the scroll (A) used to be homogeneous throughout, all blue with white flowers. In the later scrolls of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (B, C, D, and E) each border seem to have a different colour combination and pattern which makes it visually noisier that the early scroll.

Similarly, the earlier scroll offers a well-balanced pictorial surface where the architectural elements are straight and contrast with the flowing roundishness of the figures, proportionately disposed on the surface and usually regular in size. The later scroll (F) offers a completely different feeling, a greater variation of size for the figures, greater variations in colour, in architectural elements etc.

These variations in the painting style do not impair the narrative in any way. Overall, the necessities of the narrative impose an important degree of fixity in the painting which manifest in the iconography whereas changes seemed to be accepted and

embraced over time or over regions in style and decorative motifs, so long as they do not alter the iconography and serve the purpose of these genealogies in rendering them more truthful.

f. **The c. 2000 scroll**

To complete this observation of the scrolls, I would like to have a quick look at the scroll (F), which dates from c. 2000. Unfortunately, we do not have scrolls of the Padmasali Purana collected between the mid nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century which is almost more than a hundred years without a trace of stylistic change. Nevertheless I would like to draw attention to the simplification in style over time. While it seems that decorative elements increased between the seventeenth and the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, it has decreased importantly in the twenty-first. The most striking element to observe in this regard is the costumes, which is an important part of the Padmasali's life as weavers and therefore a particularly important motif in the scrolls. Unlike other scrolls, the scrolls of the Padmasali tend to depict a grander variety of costumes and patterns design on their clothes. The oldest scroll (A) has deep shades of indigo with beautifully drawn flower motifs in contrasting white. The later scrolls (B, C, and D) increased the variety and like the borders, the textile patterns seem to never be seen twice in the same scroll. A similar observation can be made with jewellery too, subtle and flowing in the oldest scroll (A), and less fine but more varied in the eighteenth and nineteenth century scrolls (B, C, and D).

The surprising change with the scroll (F) is the almost complete disappearance of textile motifs on the scroll, as well as the jewellery design. Both gods and other figures wear simple dhoti and bare chest. Only Vishnu gets a slight pattern on his dhoti and a few female figures a slight change in the saree depiction with a longer blouse, possibly reflecting current fashion. Ornaments and jewellery are reduced to its minimum and offered to female and gods only. If we think of the several figures dressed in Deccani court fashion to be found throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century scroll, we could expect similar changes in fashion in the later scroll but instead, it seems to have become secondary.

As a counterpart, there is a grander representation of fields and farming scenes with an attempt at perspective (F, reg. 10) that was not seen before. This may be explained by the increasing visibility for the painter, of western modes of depiction, particularly through the formal art school training received by Vinay and Sai Kiran for instance where they learn from western naturalist modes of depiction. Besides, with the recent shift in patronage that took place in the Cheriyal painting style, the painters have developed new secular iconography which translated mostly into what the painters call 'village' scenes. These scenes represent rural activities in the bold 'authentic' and 'rural' style, as per the demands of the handicrafts market, which I shall develop in the next chapter. It is possible to see the inclusion of such scenes into the sacred narrative of the Padmasalis as a consequence of these new developments in patronage. If we think of the eighteenth and nineteenth century scrolls depicting regularly figures wearing those typical Deccani courtly costumes, we may want to see similar indication of alternative patronage at that time. Perhaps the painters were in touch with their contemporary iconography by direct patronage from other contemporary sources or by encounter with these styles in different visual forms.

Whether we believe the painters answered other patrons earlier as they do now or not, the farming scene or the Deccani costumes do not directly take part in the overall narrative, but do they alter the Padmasali sacred genealogies, they only reflect the painters' liberties towards the scroll making and indicate elements of contemporaneity. It is not without importance that these elements are the most difficult to identify and the scenes of musician players in the nineteenth century is almost impossible to identify as it does not take part to the narrative, neither does the farming scene in the c. 2000s scroll. They are illustrative of underlying influences, reflecting the painter or performer's own time.

The fixity of the painting practice reflects the needs of its function, legitimising a community's existence. It also allows us to have an idea of what scrolls were in the past, similar to what they are now. But the elements of variation reflect its contemporaneity instead. While the fixity mostly belongs to the patrons, I believe the variation mostly belongs to the painters. In between, the performers mediate both and use the fixity and the contemporaneity for the same purpose, to narrate the genealogy of their patron. This clearly adds to the understanding among those three communities that

contributes to the overall fixity of the caste and sub-caste dependency system that we highlighted in the previous chapter.

2. Innovative changes: The Katam Raju Katha

The narrative of the Padmasali follows a rather conventional and fixed development over time, therefore encouraging the belief that the oral narrative followed moderate changes as well. I would like to propose a rather different situation for the story of the Golla caste.

The Golla's professional occupation is herdsmen, cowherds and milk sellers. They are known in other parts of Andhra Pradesh and India as Yadava. In Telangana and parts of Andhra Pradesh, the Mandaheccus, who are the *adugukunetollu* (asker) for the Golla, narrate the Katam Raju Katha, the story of the hero Katam Raju, the ancestor of the Golla. Information on this particular narrative, the patron community and the performing community is scattered among several disciplines and in both English and Telugu. The Katam Raju Katha ballad has been collected and commented by folklorists but not in its entirety and there is no certainty that anyone remembers it entirely.[10] Apart from Subba Rao[11] who collected twenty ballads from the overall Katha and published it in Telugu, Narayan Rao[12] documented parts of the ballad and commented upon the ambiguity of Gangamma in the story. Sadanandam[13] proposes a summary of the story but importantly, an account of the performing groups and their location, their different names and relation with their patrons. Finally, recently published *Kalamkari Temple Hangings* from the V&A are commented by Dallapicolla[14] who attempts for the first time to corroborate known elements of the narrative with visual supports used during the performance, and with inscriptions. Apart from this, no other study on the combination of narrative and visual support has been produced. Part of the Yadava

[10] "Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. 133.
[11] Rao Subba.T. V. *Katama Raju Kathalu* (Telugu), Hyderabad: Andhra University Sahitya Akademi, 1978 and 1986.
[12] Rao. "Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Katamaraju and Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic" and Rao, "Epics and Ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics" in Stuart H. Blackburn Stuart H., and Ramanujan A. K. (eds.). *Another Harmony: New Essays On the Folklore of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. 131-164.
[13] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*.
[14] Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*.

social struggle in North India is also touched upon by Christophe Jaffrelot[15] which helps understanding the social emancipation of the caste and the importance of their genealogies in that context.

The dispersal of information into several disciplines and their lack of connection make it difficult to offer a complete overview of the situation. Nevertheless, there is more research and commentary on the Katam Raju Katha that any other caste narrative performed in Telangana. For what concerns this chapter, I would like to present the variety of visual support for the Katam Raju Katha narrative as in contrast with the more conventional scrolls painted for other performing bards and propose several hypotheses on what it reflects about this particular narrative.

a. **Patrons and performers**

The people performing the Katam Raju Katha in Telangana are mostly known as Mandaheccus. In other parts of Andhra Pradesh, they may be known by other names but all belong to the Golla caste.[16] These communities of Gollas and their respective performers the Mandaheccus may be found until now across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which makes the performance tradition broader than other communities presented earlier. At times, the Madiga have also been spotted performing the story of Katam Raju but there is no information on their right to perform it.[17] They may be performing the Katam Raju in the context of priestly activities that they officiate for several other castes in the region and not exactly in the tradition of patron's narratives that we are discussing. Even if other people perform the Katha, the ownership of performance for the Gollas is to the Mandaheccus.[18]

Like other performing community in the region, each troupe possesses a copper plate with authentication of the relation between the Gollas and the Mandaheccus and the *mirasi* for which they are allowed to take alms from. They recite the Katam Raju Katha

[15] Jaffrelot, Christophe "Sanskritisation and division among Yadavs and Kurmis" in Jaffrelot, Christophe., and Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes*. London: C. Hurst, 1999. 187-199.
[16] For more information Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*. and Claus, Peter J., Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Ann Mills. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia : Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
[17] Rao. "Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Katamaraju and Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic" 119.
[18] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 5-63

and at times the *Krishna Leelalu* (Krishna Lila) stories to their patrons with the help of wooden figurines produced by the Nakashis. The Gollas worship Gangamma for which they also dedicate festivals and ritual worship during which the Katha may be performed too. Gangamma is considered as a local goddess in Telangana but is also associated to the pan-Indian deity Ganga.

b. **The narrative**

The genealogy of the Golla community is complex. According to Sadanandam, there are thirty two stories within the whole Katha.[19] Like other caste Puranas, the historicity of the Katam Raju Katha genealogy cannot be verified, yet all sources agree to confirm the existence of the last three generations of Rajus: Avula Valaraju, Peddiraju and Katam Raju. The Katha narrates the story of these three generations of Rajus as well as other further events that align the Golla to Yadu, himself an ancestor of Krishna.

Avula Valaraju handed down his kingdom to his son Peddiraju, who moved to another region after a few years of reign. As Peddiraju had no children of his own, he divided everything he owned between his brothers and left with his wife Pedamma to pray to Shiva. Because of his devotion, he was gifted with a son and a daughter. His son was Katam Raju. Peddiraju entered some conflict over land with the local king Valiketuvaraju and died during their quarrel. Katam Raju, then seven years old, went onto the battlefield to fetch his father's body. At that time, Gangamma appeared to him and after several courtship and quarrelling episodes, she fell in love with him and asked him to marry her. Katam Raju refused and brought his father's dead body back to perform the death rituals. His mother committed sati and he and his sister, now orphaned, moved to their cousin's place, Bhaktiranna, in the capital Danakonda. Eventually, Katam Raju decided to shift to Nellore where the land was more fertile for his cattle. The Chola King of Nellore Nallasiddhi then entered into an agreement and allowed him to settle there. Due to a series of uncertain events but most probably related to a drought that led Katam Raju's cattle to eat rice fields, or to the fact that Nallasiddhi had killed Katam Raju's uncle and attracted Katam Raju's revenge, both entered a battle and died. The battle is known as the Yerragaddapadu. Somewhere in the middle of this series of events related to land, it is not sure whether Katam Raju married Gangamma or

[19] Ibid., 63.

not and their status always remained ambiguous[20]. The relation between Gangamma and Katam Raju, and the reason for Katam Raju's fight with Nallasiddhi, either over land or revenge, are examples of uncertainties and variation in the narrative. Narayana Rao[21] has linked these ambiguities to the overall ambiguous status of the Golla caste.

The Yadava kings have always been involved with cattle herding activities, among them disposing the animals' bodies. This makes them impure and associates their community to the low caste Shudra. But their relation to cows and milk also led them to claim their descent from Krishna, therefore aiming for the higher Kshatriya caste group of warriors to which the deity belongs. Like other warriors, they must carry values of bravery, readiness to die on the battlefield, honour and protection. It is not my intention to develop further the case study of the Yadava's aspirations for social uplift but it is interesting to know that other initiatives from the low caste association have been documented elsewhere in India.[22] The strong disposition of the Yadava to climb the caste hierarchy has made their narrative and the performance of that narrative an important tool towards achieving this. Besides, the actual existence of three Rajus is a strong advantage as in comparison with other caste narratives that do not always have such historicity to provide.[23] The important battle of Yerragaddapadu for instance may date from the last quarter of the thirteenth century.[24]

For this reason, the Katam Raju is historicised more than other stories and refers strongly to historical battles and moments as an assurance of its existence. The emphasis would not be on the divine origin of the Yadava but on their relation with the Yadava kings and their excellent warriorship instead. The insistence on the historical genealogy makes the visual rendering of the narrative rather different than the other ones available in the region and particularly irregular. In contrast with the Padmasali Purana for instance that only devotes one third of its performance and visual narrative to the actual Padmasali story and divide their narrative into three clear sections, the Katam Raju Katha is an accumulation of several stories, independent to a certain extent.[25] Because of the rather opened nature of the narrative, the visual translations of the Katam

[20] Rao. "Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Katamaraju and Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic."
[21] Ibid.
[22] Jaffrelot, "Sanskritisation and division among Yadavs and Kurmis."
[23] Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*. 133.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Sadanandam. *Art and Culture of the Marginalised Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh*, 62.

Raju Katha are varied and the painters, performers and patrons, all react dynamically to this variety, which is what I now present.

c. From dolls to scroll

At the time of fieldwork in 2014 and from Sadanandam's references, the Mandaheccus in Telangana were known to be performing the Katam Raju Katha with the aid of wooden figurines. [26] Several of the painters (Vaikuntam, Rakesh, and Sai Kiran) told me that a full set comprises 53 figurines but I have not been able to confirm this information with the performers themselves. The process of making these figurines is complex and lengthy. The performers carry the figurines in a basket with them to the villages where they perform.

I collected several visual representations of the Katam Raju Katha and I would like to present the following: The first one is the set of figurines (G) now exhibited at DakshinaChitra near Chennai. Later in the Telugu University, I found another set of figurines, incomplete as well, along with two vertical scrolls. The first scroll (H) is a recent production by Nageshwar and his son Sai Kiran. They had delivered a workshop at the university in 2003, and donated the scroll they produced during their stay. The scroll was therefore not put in circulation among performers. The other scroll was painted just before I started my fieldwork, in June 2013 for the Mandaheccus (I).

Since I thought Mandaheccus used to perform the story with the wooden figurines, I inquired about the reason for the scroll and the painters explained that when the Mandaheccus came to commission a new set of dolls, earlier in 2013, they could not get the *poniki* wood due to a shortage of the material in the region. Several newspaper articles around the time reported the incident and its impact on the local Nakashi craftsmen, especially those from Nirmal who are important producers of toys using the *poniki*. [27]

[26] Ibid.
[27] Harpal Singh, S. (2013). "Nirmal artisans face raw material shortage." *The Hindu*. January 14, 2013 thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/nirmal-artisans-face-raw-material-shortage/article4305964.ece

Because of this material constraint, the painters and the performers both agreed to transfer the narrative onto a scroll. Surprisingly, the new commission of the Katam Raju Katha was not only transferred on to a two dimensional format but on to a horizontal one, rather unusual in the scroll tradition (I). Apart from the Jambavanta Purana narrated for the Madigas by the Dakkali and at times, the Madel Purana narrated for the Chakkalis by the Ganjilotulus, the other scrolls are all vertical. The painters were making a scroll of the Katam Raju Katha for the first time but they had produced figurine sets several times in their career. For this reason, they could translate the majority of the characters and important scenic elements of the narrative on to the scroll without great difficulty. With the help of the performers, they could add detail they would not know by themselves.

d. **Itinerant traditions**

The overall organisation of the horizontal scroll of the Katam Raju Katha is however unusual for horizontal scrolls of the Cheriyal tradition. In *Kalamkari Temple Hangings,* Dallapiccola discussed two hangings of Gangamma which depict the Katam Raju Katha.[28] These were also made for the Golla caste but in the kalamkari technique, different from the Cheriyal scrolls. These kalamkaris have a greater numbers of episodes and narrative elements than the Cheriyal scrolls and several other differences but in spite of these, both the 2013 horizontal scroll (I) and the V&A hangings (J) show a similar organisation. Gangamma is depicted as the main and largest figure in the middle of the cloth. The narrative scenes and the presentation of the characters are distributed on her sides. Both paintings must be looked at horizontally, even if the Cheriyal scroll is much longer. Registers are narrower and more numerous in the kalamkari but nevertheless divided in a similar fashion in both scrolls. The kalamkaris were produced in Machilipatnam, known for its kalamkari temple hanging traditions. The region is further south of Telangana in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The performance of the Katam Raju in this part of Andhra Pradesh uses these hanging as part of their visual tools.[29]

[28] Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings,* 132-55.
[29] Peter J. Claus, 'Katama Raju' in Claus, Peter J., Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Ann Mills. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia : Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 329-30.

What is surprising here is that the Mandaheccus in Telangana usually perform with the figurines; but the region also has a strong scroll tradition still circulating. In spite of this, the performers and painters both worked the narrative in the manner of one of these temple hangings usually used in a different region. It hard to believe that the painters could have seen a kalamkari of the Gangamma Katha before, but the Mandaheccus, by virtue of being itinerant, may encounter other depiction and other performative tools in other parts of the state, possibly bringing those with them to the painters. If this was the case, it is interesting to see that performers may be responsible for such innovation of the tradition. It also reinforces the suggestion that performers brought the caste Puranas to Telangana and adapted it to the local available artisans.

e. **Narratives' necessity in painting**

In comparison with the figurines, painted scrolls and hangings offer greater narrative possibilities. For instance, while major characters are easily identifiable in the figurine set, like Gangamma, and the major Rajus (G), the battle scene with dolls relies more on the performers' dramatic skill and the association of several figurines together to suggest the crowded event. The scroll's materiality and its narrative dimension would allow more detailed translation of the Yerragaddapadu battle or the marriage of Gangamma to Katam Raju for instance. The pictorial space permits sequence of events and visual details that sculpture would not.

Remarkably, the transfer of the figurines onto the scroll is rather peculiar and does not use these facilities provided by the scroll materiality to its full extent. Instead of flowing narrative scenes and conversing figures like in other scrolls, the Katam Raju scroll of 2013 (I) depicts these heroes and kings in a sequential and frontal manner, at times on horses, at times on foot. Even when an attempt is made at visual narration, the overall look is stiffer, figures aligned, architectural elements well-ordered etc. None of the scrolls that I have encountered of the Katam Raju Katha utilises this facility to develop chronological scenes, apart from an attempt at movement in the Yerragaddapadu battle scene (H). Instead, they tend to enumerate characters on to the scroll the way dolls would do too.

The presentation of the painting in performance leads to a similar observation. While performers usually unfold the scroll progressively, as the performance goes, the kalamkaris (J) and the horizontal scrolls (I) are meant to be opened at once and in full. While the first option serves the chronology of the narrative and its sequences, the second is used as a backdrop. The performers may not use the scroll as a visual aid here, the way we have seen they do with the other castes narratives for instance. Jyotindra Jain's research on the *Mata ni pachedi*, the temple tent of the goddess from Gujarat explained that these hangings were used by the low caste as a moving temple as they were not allowed to enter temples due to their impurity.[30] Similarly, as we have seen earlier with the Rajasthani *phad*, the scrolls that serve the performance also play the role of hosting deities to worship. This could have been the case with the low caste Gollas too. Like the hangings of the *Mata ni Pachedi* in Gujarat, the Cheriyal horizontal scroll and the V&A kalamkaris all depict the goddess in the middle, as a temple idol, and as the major figure around which the other episodes of the story revolve.

As Dallapiccola notices with the Gangamma *dupatti* (blanket), the length of the Katam Raju narrative makes it almost impossible for the performers to know the entire story. This could explain why the episodes do not seem to follow a chronology.[31] The performers' knowledge of the story depends on several factors: the transmission of the story from their fathers, the version recorded in the palm leaf manuscript that they may keep with them, regional differences or even from personal choices to avoid particular events. This may be one of the reasons why the common feature of the paintings of the Katam Raju is to choose isolated events, all presented at once on a hanging rather than unfolded chronologically like the other Telangana scrolls. Hanging the scroll in full adds to this freedom for the performers not to follow chronological storyline but point out episodes as they wish, once again recalling the Rajasthani *phad* organisation of the pictorial space.

The second possible explanation follows the particularity of the Katam Raju Katha which is the emphasis on historical kings and characters and their genealogies. The importance of the narrative's own characters is well responded to by the medium of figurines. In the figurine performance, the performers would use dramatic techniques and pick a figurine one at time, introduce it and relate it to another figurine. This way,

[30] Fischer, Eberhard. *Temple Tents for Goddesses in Gujarat, India*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2014.
[31] Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*, 133.

there is a great freedom of connecting characters with each other and allowing their interactions. The recent scroll painted by Nageshwar (H) offers quite a direct transposition of the figurines onto canvas. It is a short scroll and most of the registers are equally divided. They enumerate the most important figures of the narratives. Apart from the battle scene which is quite hieratic as well, no other narrative scene is depicted.

The nature of the Katam Raju Katha story, and the message it conveys for and to his patrons seems to coincide with the visual medium of figurines of heroes. As a sort of synthesis of an endless ballad, the use of figurines allows a straightforward and humanised performance that focuses on the major requirement of their patrons, the assertion of their genealogy. As we saw that the Padmasali tend to depict a wide range of textile designs in their scroll, the Gollas and Yadavas includes a lot of heroes and figures to establish their lineage. In spite of the major difference in support, the series of Rajus and their sons, brothers and wives are the key elements of the narratives which are found on any of the visual supports used for the performance.

3. Continuity and changes in Cheriyal paintings for the local communities of Telangana

The variety of support and differences between the several versions of the narrative, along with the lack of scholarship on the subject makes it difficult to fix one version of the Katam Raju Katha performance. Instead, the story tells us about a narrative that offers large possibilities of translation into visual supports- and most probably oral medium too- as well as a degree of versatility within the storyline to allow such variety. The factors that alter the visual support and performance may vary on the basis of regional differences, availability of material, goal of the narrative and performing preferences or capabilities.

This is not the case with other narratives that differ only moderately in comparison with the Katam Raju. Yet, what seems to be joining both the intentional conservatism and the visual dynamism is the fixed iconography that ensures that the genealogical message of the patron caste is conveyed. The lack of innovation is to be understood as an intentional choice, as it were for the Rajasthani *phad*, and required by the receptors of

the tradition as a whole, the patrons of the performances.[32] And as long as the function of these performances and their visual support is respected, not only the painters, but the performers and patrons are equally responding. Finally, all elements of the painting's production, materiality and variation seems to revolve around its function, which identifies the painting as a fundamental trait of the religious, social and political identity of the communities that live in Telangana.

[32] Singh, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan."

Chapter V

Cheriyal painting as craft

From a scroll that narrates the local genealogical caste Puranas, Cheriyal paintings' have subsequently become embedded within a complex network of patronage by individuals and institutions and within discourses upon ideas of art and crafts. In the previous chapters, these paintings were shown to participate in the local religious and domestic life by embodying the deities' presence and in functioning as village entertainment. This defined painting as a fundamental trait of the communities that live in Telangana and for which continuity and change are both apprehended through its utilitarian dimension. Then, while observing more closely the peculiar material features of the scrolls, the relative fixity of this materiality over time, and the long life of these objects, we highlighted criteria that would trigger museums' and collectors' curiosity that value them as art.

Due to conjunct changes taking place in all the three communities of patrons, performers and painters in response to modernisation, the tradition of Cheriyal scroll paintings has significantly evolved. Patrons of genealogical performances have emancipated financially and shifted to other more lucrative activities, performers have shifted profession or developed their acting skills further and now perform for a wider audience. As for painters, they have become redefined as 'Indian craftsmen.' What happened is that the utilitarian dimension of the paintings as well as what it says about the ritual and the social interaction of the communities that consume them, served to push Cheriyal paintings into 'craft' as a made category.

In the late 1970s when members of the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) visited Cheriyal, the situation of Cheriyal painting as craft - in all ignorance of its connection with a performative tradition – was considered to be precarious, and owed the painting a space in the government initiatives for the revival of Indian handicrafts. Their intervention increased the visibility of the paintings, relegating the performances to a secondary position. The emphasis on the material culture of this tradition permitted their entry to museums and the market, and initiated what I present in this chapter and the

next as the institutionalisation of Cheriyal paintings. The first part looks at the revival of handicraft undertaken by the Indian government, and questions how it participated in the institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting and of folk arts in general. The following chapter (Chapter 6) looks at what owed Cheriyal paintings a place among museums in India, both conventional museums of art, and crafts museums. Across these two chapters, I discuss these new patrons, the processes in which they came to know about Cheriyal paintings, the nature of their interactions and motivations in commissioning these paintings but also what they have to say about them. In this process of institutionalisation, the makers of these paintings adapted their practice and incorporated new techniques, iconography, and style, which I discuss in the final chapter (Chapter 7).

1. The handicraft sector: government and market

a. A short history of crafts in India

Defining with precision the word 'craft' and its history is not within the scope of this thesis and is far too ambitious for what concerns our paintings. Nevertheless, it is necessary to summarise the history of the category in order to understand the current state of Indian handicraft. Paul Greenhalgh has examined the changing understanding of 'craft' as category, developing a definition through the ambiguity of the term and its history.[1] He associates the term with the development of decorative arts as a category, with the concept of the 'vernacular' and with the politics of labour in nineteenth century Britain. He states that 'craft' as a thing in itself was invented at the opening of the twentieth century with the Arts and Crafts movement.[2] The industrialisation of Europe and the development of machine-based labour opened a breach for craft as a human and skill-based production of objects and ideologically in "rebellion against the constraints of machinery."[3]

[1] Greenhalgh, Paul. 'The History of Craft', in Dormer, Peter ed. *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, 20-52.
[2] Ibid., 35-36.
[3] Ibid., 34.

In relation to Indian crafts, the expression of the 'traditionalist' tendency was first observed with the Great Exhibitions, starting from the first in 1851 in Britain. Abigail McGowan in '*All that is Rare, Characteristic, and Beautiful': Design and the Defense of Tradition in Colonial India 1851-1903,*[4] discusses these exhibitions and how traditional Indian designs became a range of invariable patterns, representing traditionalising rather than traditional design.[5] This was to serve the made-image of India as unchanged, mostly based on the actual commercial necessities of a design crisis in Britain.[6] Her article is very important as it also explains how this traditionalising of Indian objects and patterns was "countervailing" the Indian drive for "simpler styles in word, due both to the high costs of carving and the influence of European building forms."[7]

A few decades later, the Independence movement and Gandhi's quest for self-sustainability helped interrelating both artisans and the nation-state towards the construction of a unified India, represented by its deep and rich vernacular culture.[8] Kamaladevi Chattophadhyay became an important figure in the construction of the definition of Indian craft and of the handicraft sector. In the "newness and surprise of each object," she emphasises the uniqueness and individuality of each craft production.[9] She also equates it to "any of what are termed fine arts" for it involves the emotions, mind, body."[10] This definition that tends to elevate the status of craft reflects a sentiment of pride necessary for the newly-built nation that she was working in. Soumhya Venkatesan has discussed the ideological appeal of the concept of craft around Independence, standing for "rootedness" and its metonymical dimension that "materialise the collective heritage of the nation."[11] This ideology took its final form in the constitution of the All-India Handicraft Board in 1952 and marked the early years of Independence-era Indian crafts.

[4] McGowan, Abigail 'All that is Rare, Characteristic, and Beautiful': Design and the Defense of Tradition in Colonial India 1851-1903, *Journal of Material Culture* 10 (2005): 263-287.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 268.
[7] Ibid., 270-272.
[8] Mohsini, Mira. "Crafts, artisans and the Nation-State in India." in *A companion to the Anthropology of India*, Edited by Isabelle Clark-Decès. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 193.
[9] Chattopadhyaya, Kamaladevi. *The Glory of Indian Handicrafts*. New Delhi: Indian Book, 1976, 7.
[10] Ibid., 5.
[11] Venkatesan, Soumhya. *Craft Matters: Artisans, Development, and the Indian Nation*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009, 5.

Kamaladevi Chattophadhyay was appointed as the head of the AIHB from its inception until 1967. She wrote several books and articles on Indian crafts and was an important figure of the revival of handicraft as a way forward following Independence in 1947. In *The glory of Indian Handicrafts* (1976), she proposes an overview of the handicrafts of India.[12] Andhra Pradesh is well represented in several sections with woodwork, metal work such as bidriware, doll making and kalamkari among others. Kalamkari, with the shadow puppet are the two well-known painted folk art forms of Andhra Pradesh. Cheriyal is not represented in Chattophadhyay's book but at the time of her writing in the late 1970s, Andhra Pradesh was already known as an important centre of handicrafts and handlooms.

From the inception of the AIHB, there followed several other initiatives in the development and promotion of Indian handicraft on the national scale: the construction in 1956 of the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, now Crafts Museum in Delhi, the establishment of Festivals of India abroad in the 1980s, the opening of Dilli Haat in 1994 among others which I shall explain later. This complex national network was then subdivided into state and regional commissions that take care of the handicrafts and handloom necessities in respective geographical area. The AIHB is then divided into regional centres; themselves divided into field units and district offices. At the time I collected data for this section in August 2014, Telangana had been an independent state for less than two months (since June 2014) and changes in the Development Commissioner's (DC) divisions had not yet been implemented. Telangana was therefore still considered a part of Andhra Pradesh.

The state commissioner of handicraft in Andhra Pradesh was supportive of the Cheriyal tradition and the promotion is well in place today. For Andhra Pradesh, the handicraft was then under the Chennai regional centre office and has four field units: Warangal and Hyderabad (now both in Telangana), Vijayawada and Tirupati, in eastern and southern Andhra Pradesh. For Hyderabad, the districts under the care of the commissioner are Medak, Nizamabad, Rangareddy and Mahboobnagar. For Warangal, they are Khammam, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, Adilabad and Warangal. Cheriyal is located in the Warangal office and Cheriyal painting recorded as 'Nakashi painting'. The separation of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana has not yet had any direct impact on

[12] Chattophadhyay, *The Glory of Indian Handicrafts.*

the Cheriyal painting production. A new branch of emporia for Telangana is in project and the Lepakshi emporia will soon be operating only for Andhra Pradesh. This is not seen as an issue for both painters and officials of the emporia, and all agree to say that Cheriyal and Nirmal paintings were the only painting forms to be promoted in Andhra Pradesh and will remain the only ones in Telangana.

b. The All-India Handicrafts Board (AIHB)'s intervention into the lives of Cheriyal paintings

The setup of the AIHB in 1952 was supposed to relieve the underdeveloped situation of artisans and to work on the "maintenance and progress of handicrafts as well as issues such as skill training, techniques and domestic and international marketing."[13] However, if Indian handicrafts necessitated support in order to enhance the economic progress of the country, the means to achieve this were rather alien to artisans. Craftsmen knew very little of maintaining their practice through training outside the family structure and even less of marketing strategies.

While the rejuvenation of Orissa pattachitra started in the early 1950s,[14] it took place much later for Cheriyal painting. The painters located the first commissions from the Lepakshi Emporium around 1978.[15] In 1982, the Board proposed Vaikuntam who was then painting with his brother Chandraiah, to train around fifty low caste artisans, mostly from the Goud caste to the Cheriyal craft. This would at the same time serve to reduce unemployment and revive Cheriyal craft. Among the people trained, Madhu Merugoju's uncle Chandraiah learnt and pursued the practise, and later trained his nephew (Madhu) who now is one of the most innovative Cheriyal painters. According to Vaikuntam, the training appealed to people because it was paid but once they had received the money, they stopped attending.

If boosting employment among low caste communities in general seemed to be rather a failure in the view of this initiative, the already existing Cheriyal craftsmen saw their working conditions and incomes improving gradually. In fact, the demand for Cheriyal craft increased to the point when the master craftsmen eventually hired assistants from

[13]Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*, 37.
[14] Ibid., 36.
[15] 27/02/2014 Conversation with Vaikuntam

the people he trained over time to help in producing the large quantity of small masks and small paintings for the emporia. These assistants are never mentioned by any of the Nakashi family member and disregarded as Cheriyal artisans. Similarly, Madhu Merugoju, is not accepted as a member of the Cheriyal artists, in spite of his uncle having learnt and worked in the Cheriyal craft all his life. In reality, the failure to enrol new craftsmen articulated by Vaikuntam may be the reflection of his competitive sense that increased since the AIHB proposed to democratise the craft. This is one of the many subtleties in which the discourse on Cheriyal craft does not always reflect the reality of its development and that is important to consider in order to apprehend the practice with objectivity.

In comparison with other crafts from other regions of India, Cheriyal craftsmen are very few. I am thinking here about the Orissa pattachitra for which according to Bundgaard,[16] in 1955 there were already thirty families in Raghurajpur and when I visited in 2013, probably hundreds of artisans. Similarly, artisans of the *pat* paintings in West Bengal add up to hundreds of families scattered in several villages around Naya in the Medinapur district. Possibly due to their 'late' discovery, or to their very acute understanding of competition, the Cheriyal craftsmen number only three major painters, all master craftsmen and their respective families and assistants.[17] It is difficult to evaluate if the craft was actually dying at the time it received support from the government but a general sense of the current situation allows saying safely that the economic situation of the craftsmen is much better and that this is partly due to their entry to the craft market. From the annual report of 2013 consulted at the DC's office in Hyderabad in 2014, the largest amount of the year's income to Cheriyal money was earned through market promotional activities, followed by the Lepakshi Emporium's sales, private dealers in Bombay and Hyderabad and the Crafts councils of Andhra Pradesh and India.[18] Painters do not shy away from saying that private commissions pay the most in general, to the extent of justifying Vaikuntam's recent shift to the state capital Hyderabad in order to be closer to these important commissions.

With regard to the paintings strictly speaking, the situation is reassuring and the efforts of the Board are visible. But these figures take into consideration Cheriyal painting in

[16] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*, 36.
[17] Chapter 3 of this dissertation
[18] Annual reports of the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts Hyderabad 2012.

isolation, as a single craft, avoiding entirely its connection to a storytelling profession which might have received attention from another government body in charge of intangible heritage. Efforts of the government to remedy the situation of its craftsmen are noble but feeble as it fails to consider something fundamental in India which is the interrelation of professions and communities. Besides, the arbitrary nature of selection to different programmes increased competition, which I shall develop further below.

As part of the objectives for the twelfth five-year plan (2012-2017), the DC of Hyderabad had listed several tasks: obtaining state ministries and departments for the handicraft sector, working towards the abolition of VAT on handicrafts, and on a local scale increasing the supply of raw materials to the craftsmen, especially wood as it is a matter of worry in Telangana as we saw in the previous chapter with the Katam Raju Katha commission. In comparison with the uncertain report of the crafts finances, these notes offer a realistic view of the situation and of the urgent necessities of the sector. As I have already explained, the lack of wood is highly problematic for craftsmen who have been pushed to produce more for the newly formed and increasing handicraft market but cannot sustain the production due to the shortage of material. Similarly, the necessity to decentralise the sector might allow a better evaluation of the local situation, often overlooked by central officials who have only little to do with the deeply local nature of the handicrafts.

c. **The Lepakshi Emporium**

Working closely with office of the Development Commissioners (Handicrafts), the state emporia are the first market places that gather together the handicrafts of a particular state for sale in the high street. The states of Andhra Pradesh and now Telangana share a network of emporia called ‘Lepakshi’ that was founded in 1982. The Development Commissioner of Handicrafts in the Southern region manages it. These emporia function as showrooms divided into sections where one can find all the handicrafts that the state has to provide. They are generally supplied with fresh objects regularly and have numerous showrooms in the state capital Hyderabad as well as in major cities of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and one extra in Kolkata and at the Rajiv Gandhi Crafts Bhavan in Delhi.

The marketing director of the Lepakshi Emporium located in Musheerabad in Hyderabad, manages several layers of sales that take place through the showroom platform. The showroom does not only function as a retail outlet but also a point of negotiation between craftsmen and patrons. The director Laxminath explained that a lot of commissions take place through his mediation between the patrons and the artists. Clients interested in Cheriyal painting after visiting the store or those who already know about it can commission something special and tailored directly to the painters through Lepakshi. The Emporium is the major networking platform for the artists to advertise their work. Museums may also commission through Lepakshi. Finally, the director himself may choose one particular Cheriyal painter instead of another to fulfil one new product to be sold in the shop. For instance, he commissioned Madhu Merugoju to produce 12 panels of mythological stories related to the 12 months of the Telangana calendar. This was released in 2014 and the panels were printed in a calendar format and sold in the emporia. This is important as the Lepakshi emporia are much more than stores and most of the DC's activities are mediated through Lepakshi that knows the painters more closely.

Madhu Merugoju, who works from Hyderabad, produces around a hundred small paintings (76 x 40 centimetres) per month for Lepakshi, which he does not sign. He keeps making them ahead of orders. One painting of 30 x 30 centimetres is made in about four days and costs around three hundred rupees (£3). He does not sell masks. As for Vaikuntam's family, I do not have the figures but Lepakshi is their first customer.[19]

Inside the emporia, one can find relatively small Cheriyal paintings and masks (Fig. 5. 1 and 5. 2). The paintings are advertised as coming from only one place, which is Cheriyal. The vocabulary insists on the authenticity of the practice, its traditional techniques, style and subject matter, in accordance with the discourse on craft I have presented earlier. The fact that the practice is about to disappear and that only one family now remains in Cheriyal is also part of the discourse. The function of scroll paintings that narrate the local castes stories is nowhere cited. Instead, the paintings are describes as wall hanging, masks and decorative objects. On the Lepakshi website however, it is said that "Cheriyal paintings or scroll paintings are used by a community known as "kaki padagollu" that uses this medium as a visual aid to narrate stories from

[19] 27/02/2014 Discussion with Vaikuntam and Rakesh

the Ramayana and Mahabharata.[20] The Kaki padagollu (Kakipadigela) do not designate the performers in general but the particular caste that performs sections of the Mahabharata and of the Ramayana to the Mudiraj (farmers). This portion of information is enough to create a connection with one particular community, and awareness of a targeted purchase for the buyer. The second part clearly favours the mention of the pan-Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata as the stories, instead of mentioning other local castes narratives that no one knows about and that serves legitimisation of low castes which probably would not appeal to wealthier upper caste Indian customers. It is important to note that enough information should be given to the customers so that they can connect with their purchase hence enhance their attachment to the object and potentially increase further sale. Yet the information should remain generic and oriented to what people may know or may want to know as well.

d. **Crafts '*melas*'**

As part of the activities of the AIHB and often with support of the state departments of tourism and other organisation, crafts fairs (*mela*) in India are regularly organised across the country. The most important one is probably that located in Delhi and opened as a permanent venue known as Dilli Haat. Dilli Haat was set up in 1994 and displays handicrafts from all over India on sale in a village-like market. Mira Mohsini looked at this particular *haat* (market) in Delhi and explains that the idea was to reduce the influence of middlemen into the commerce of these artefacts and therefore increase the craftsmen's direct income.[21] In producing and selling on site while customers can visit and buy at the same time, the exchange of craft is more direct. The handicrafts found on these markets are not only paintings, for it is also possible to acquire textiles, toys, paintings, jewellery etc. In addition to their market area, these crafts *melas* organise folk and classical dance performances, workshops and live demonstration of crafts, and occasionally thematic exhibitions of a particular craft.

In 1992, the department of Tourism Andhra Pradesh opened Shilparamam, a similar market-like space in Hyderabad. Just outside Hyderabad, the arts and crafts village is located in the fairly new extension of the city called Madhapur but also known as

[20] lepakshihandicrafts.gov.in

[21] Mohsini, "Crafts, artisans and the Nation-State in India," 186

HiTech city where most of IT companies are set up. Here, like at Dilli Haat, visitors can decide to just walk around and observe some of the crafts on display as in a museum or they can decide to buy some of these too. The village-like space is divided into several sections such as a village museum, an amphitheatre for performances, a market space and several gardens with sculptures, rocks or waterfalls to accommodate both these functions.

'Cheriyal art' is represented in the village museum (Fig. 3). One of the huts is decorated with a Cheriyal style frieze, similar to those painted on temples which I presented in Chapter 2. Seen in this context, 'Cheriyal art' is understood as an art of domestic decoration on wall. Not necessarily wrong, it is of course far from being accurate and both paintings on temple or on scrolls have been discarded here. Alternatively, Nageshwar and his family attend Shilparamam's temporary fairs and exhibition where they display and sell Cheriyal objects such as masks and figurines and boxes along with paintings on canvas of various formats but never more than A2 size. As the webpage states, this "Arts and Crafts village is a tribute to the cultural legacy of India" and "help flourish the culture of India's glorious past and provides a unique occasion to take home a piece of Indian art."[22] These particular goals have little to do with the nature and the accuracy of the arts and crafts displayed themselves. Instead, it recalls Brian Durrans' ideological and commercial dimension of crafts,[23] here respectively fulfilled by exotification in the village museum, and variety in the market section. For this reason, it is not necessary to know exactly what Cheriyal paintings are but instead to convey the message of a cultural and traditional India and to sell artefacts.

I visited these places several times and to my surprise could not see Cheriyal paintings represented with a permanent stall like Madhubani paintings from Bihar or Pattachitras from Orissa usually were. Discussions with Vaikuntam led me to understand that they do not really appreciate these fairs.[24] For him, the reason is that in comparison with other commissions he gets, these *melas* do not provide a significant income. The prices are low and bargaining important; the margin of income is not worth their presence on either a temporary or a permanent position. Besides, there seem to be too few customers to consider it worth the time spent on site. Similarly, Nagesh Rao, a social entrepreneur

[22] shilparamam.in
[23] Durrans, Brian. "Handicrafts, Ideology and the festival of India." *South Asia research* No. 1 (May 1982) Vol 2
[24] 27/02/2014

I met at a workshop on Cheriyal painting, dislikes these fairs for the marketing strategies they adopt and the 'cheap' connotation they give to the objects.[25] He believes that no real lover of handicraft would come and that the customers are not connoisseurs enough. He compares them to a local market.[26] Vaikuntam recently shifted to Hyderabad to be closer to commissions from private customers and showed no interest in settling a stall in the Shilparamam market when customers may easily come to his home. He even refused last year's invitation (2014) from Shilparamam and Dilli Haat and adopted a derogatory discourse about their fellow craftsmen from other places in India who attend these fairs.[27] Those are discarded on the basis of their presence in these markets, therefore doubting their authenticity as craftsmen.

Every year the Surajkund Mela Authority & Haryana Tourism in collaboration with Union Ministries of Tourism, Textiles, Culture and External Affairs organise the Surajkund International Craft Mela in Surajkund, Faridabad, Haryana, north of Delhi. Cheriyal painters are systematically invited. In 2016, Telangana was the 'theme' state of the *mela* and Rakesh Nakash, Vaikuntam's son attended the fair. Rakesh Nakash is trained in the Cheriyal painting but spends most of the time in promotional events as his level of English is the best among the family and he received formal education in marketing and foreign languages. Madhu Merugoju who also lives in Hyderabad, attended the Surajkund Mela in 2008 and regarded it with great pride. He won the second best stall award at the fair and was proud to introduce this as one of his achievement as an artist.[28] Regularly, Nageshwar presents a stall of Cheriyal artefacts at Shilparamam and if he admits that they don't sell much, he did not show any discontent about going there.

These various views on the handicraft market seem to be dividing the craftsmen's relation to their work into several categories. While the elder and most awarded painter can afford to reject and look down upon this market, his younger counterpart Nageshwar still considers it as worth attending. Nageshwar lives in Cheriyal and receives fewer private and museum commissions than his uncle Vaikuntam, and his financial situation is feebler. Besides those two, Madhu is an outsider and considers all commissions as greatly encouraging and part of his own settlement into the Cheriyal

[25] 17/05/2014 Conversation with Nagesh Rao
[26] 17/05/2014
[27] 27/02/2014 Discussion with Vaikuntam and Rakesh
[28] 21/02/2014 Discussion with Madhu

painting tradition. The underlying process of institutionalisation through the market makes the craftsmen seek for recognition, which is often associated with financial reward. Once the statutory and financial stability is achieved, the same craftsmen may reject the lowest orders that partly owed him this recognition. At the same time, these commissions still need to be fulfilled and they are mostly fulfilled by the younger generation who are not yet fully emancipated artistically, and shadowed by the elders. During my time spent with the painters, I could identify these relations through daily exchange of conversation and domestic rules too. Alongside this strict family structure that defines the painting production, Madhu has been trained by his uncle, himself trained in the eighties at the workshop I mentioned earlier. The issues of family traditions and hierarchy are not at all measured the same way as with other painters but the ambition remains to be recognised as a Cheriyal master.

People visiting these *melas* could be anyone visiting the city with an interest in handicrafts or in search of entertainment. Domestic and international tourists enjoy finding all handicrafts gathered together in the same space, which makes it easier for them to complete their shopping experience. International tourists are in search of souvenirs for themselves and the people who stayed in their home country, as a token of their visit. Indian visitors may come as part of family activities or tourism. These handicrafts market are also visited by wealthy urban customers, with a certain awareness of their own culture and a liking for trendy 'ethnic' goods and an idea that these objects may convey this 'rootedness.' A similar trend can be observed among European homes, trying to go back to their roots with the expansion of the organic food market and the conversion of ancient utilitarian objects into decorative ones. The appeal is conceptual customers are searching for values of authenticity best carried by crafts. The connoisseurship of tradition and techniques are not primary criteria for this market but variety and the authentic 'flavour.'

e. **Home visits**

At times, people visit the painters' homes directly. During the time I spent with Vaikuntam's family, I have observed the passage of several visitors. Mostly women, these customers would visit the painter's home with an interest in the making techniques, in the history and would acquire or order tailored paintings for themselves,

for the people they represent, or for their homes. The very visit of these potential customers implies a certain level of connoisseurship in the crafts, or in crafts in general and the financial ease to take such trips to Cheriyal, hardly accessible without a private driver and a 'guide.' These customers are mostly upper class urban or non resident Indians, taking the trip on business, or making a family visit, spending time on learning about handicrafts as part of their personal interest or in relation to personal project they conduct in the field such as school presentation and workshop, private decorative projects or short articles.

In these occasional visits, there is a mixed intention of documenting and collecting which usually demands particular preparation from the painters. The visitors are welcomed with tea; they are introduced to the several awards that the family has received, and to the precarious state of the crafts to the extent that "only one family remains," regardless of the authenticity of the information. After the introduction, they are shown a great variety of small and low value paintings and objects that one could find at the *melas*. Most of the time after this basic introduction, there is a more in-depth conversation about the origin of the paintings, the relation with performances and the technique, which follows by a showcase of much finer and bigger paintings for which they are working nowadays for private customers. This is all part of the promotional discourse set up by the handicraft sector and then transferred to the craftsmen themselves through an accumulation of received awards, and their ceremonies, but also through the *melas* in which they participate and where the major concern is to sell these authentic and dying Indian crafts.

The painters do not differentiate commissions on the basis of their customer's taste, the creative input or the making process, but rather on their financial potential. While customers expect to buy either a bit of real India or an experience of the real India in choosing between the *mela* experience and the direct visit, the painters only make differences between the money these commissions will bring to the family. When I first visited Vaikuntam's home in December 2012, he was living in Cheriyal, in the family house next to his brother's. He then took me through a very similar process and reached the time when he showed me fine and big paintings he had in stock. They were numerous, at times in miniature style, at times closer to the scroll for performance format, always depicting Rama or Krishna stories.

On the 10th of February 2014, one lady and her daughter visited Vaikuntam's new home in Hyderabad. The visit took place much along the lines of what I just described and the visitors eventually acquired long size paintings of the Ramayana for display in a school in Maharashtra, and for a project on crafts education within Maharashtrian English medium schools. On that day, the painters then told me that these customers had acquired the last of the tall and fine paintings they had in stock, and that in the recent years, they could not find time to produce similar paintings ahead any more. In two years, they exhausted their stock of paintings and quite clearly, the craft is no longer extinguishing. One may foresee a bright future for the Cheriyal painters, perhaps the necessity to train more craftsmen to answer the increasing demand. Yet, the very foundation of the discourse on dying practices used to increase the sale relies on the assumptions that customers will retain their ethical buying mind, itself based on the feeble reliability of commercial trends.

f. **Others**

Apart from the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), its shop front in the Lepakshi Emporium and the network of craft *melas*, several other organisation or protagonists are involved directly or indirectly with the promotion of Cheriyal paintings. I cannot present all of them in detail but I would like to go through some of them to understand what they convey about the tradition.

The tourist sector is an important vector of information about Cheriyal paintings. Before the creation of the Telangana state in June 2014, the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) used to run tours to visit Cheriyal and discover the making of this craft in its local context. Since Andhra Pradesh and Telangana split, none of the state government's tourist organisation has continued these tours and Cheriyal painting is no longer part of either of these corporations. The importance of the tourist sector is considerable not only domestically but also abroad and Cheriyal painters take part in various programmes organised through tourist's organisations such as the Surajkund Mela which I introduced earlier but also the International Tourism Bazaar (ITB) Berlin in which Rakesh Nakash participated in 2011. As a Travel Trade show, the venue exhibits crafts from all over the world and funds the artisan's stay at the fair.

Nagesh Rao in Hyderabad is a social entrepreneur in the handicraft sector. He works with Cheriyal painting as part of his own business that comprises three branches: a designing branch for accessories called 'Aambr,' the organisation of workshop to promote local artisans, and a middleman platform that mediate clients and artisans in the production of handicrafts for the private sector. His designing activities are oriented towards the amelioration of craftsmen and women's working condition through an ethical production and sale of their production. He also works towards improving financial and social situation of backward communities. For instance, he produces bags for which he hires only women from a rural area around Hyderabad. He helps them to open a personal bank account to receive their salary, in receiving training, and he adapts to their domestic lives. He explained his social entrepreneurship as a business that takes the artisan's side first in managing transaction. The workshops he organises mostly are on Cheriyal painting and conducted by Sai Kiran Nakash, Nageshwar's son, living and working from suburban Hyderabad. These workshops take place at 'Our Sacred Space' in Hyderabad; a centre dedicated to cultural activities such as dance and yoga but also handicraft and food. Finally, for his role as a middleman, he works with various local artisans from the bidriware craftsmen, to the Pochampalli saree weavers among others.

Occasionally, a few Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) also work with Cheriyal artists. Tharuni is an NGO working with girls and women in the Telangana region. They also supported Cheriyal paintings in their promotion in designing a small research project that gathered together information on the tradition. The document explains the process of making masks and paintings and enumerates the patronising castes. Tharuni is focused on helping sustainability of the artisans working on Cheriyal painting with an emphasis of the rural origin of the practice. Other NGOs working with Cheriyal paintings are not usually oriented towards the support and promotion of dying crafts but work towards upliftment of backward people. A few NGOs such as Association of Lady Entrepreneur of Andhra Pradesh (ALEAP) and their Vandemataram project have funded the training of Telangana women in the Cheriyal craft so that they can increase their income and earn recognition outside their household. Cheriyal painting then becomes a medium of social upliftment. Nageshwar hired one of the women trained during such workshop and she now works as a regular assistant of the family production.

The state government also helps to promote Cheriyal painting by commissioning paintings for decorating official buildings spaces or in gifting samples of these paintings

to people during government receptions.[29] Crafts councils of different states organise workshop through their institutions and promote other states' arts and crafts. The crafts council of Karnataka, Kuteera, organises an annual exhibition in which Cheriyal artists participated at the Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore. [30] The crafts council of Tamil Nadu through DakshinaChitra also organises such workshops in which the painters have participated. The Centre for Social Development in Hyderabad commissioned a Cheriyal painting mural inside its headquarters to represent disability.

Finally, the Cheriyal artist's online presence is constantly growing and Vaikuntam Nakash has both a blog and a Wikipedia page.[31] Madhu Merugoju also has a google + and twitter page where he posts his most recent commissions.[32] Tharuni uploaded the report they constituted after working with Cheriyal. The Lepakshi Emporium continues promoting Cheriyal painting online as one of the highlights of the state.

g. **Conclusion**

All the entities I presented above constitute what Venkatesan [33] and Bundgaard[34] define as respectively 'craft' and 'art' 'worlds:' a group of government bodies, organisations and private businesses all interested in the promotion of Cheriyal painting for its traditional features that reflect ancient and rooted Indian culture and for the commercial possibilities of such discourse. The 'social' dimension of these crafts is carried out by the government initiatives and pushed further into the private market sector as well. The dynamism of traditional craft is set aside, as frozen in time, retaining but a few discursive aspects such as its fragility therefore increasing the sales as a necessity to support it.

While proposing possible interpretations of the Festivals of India that took place in 1982 in Britain, Durrans locates the presentation of crafts as part of the ideological message of India's timeless village as well as worth buying because of its authenticity.[35] What

[29] 19/12/2012 Information given by Veerender Mallam from the Salar Jung Museum at our first meeting
[30] 10/02/2014 brochure found at Vaikuntam's home.
[31] vaikuntamnakash.blogspot.co.uk / wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheriyal_scroll_painting
[32] twitter.com/madhumerugoju
[33] Venkatesan. *Craft Matters: Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation*
[34] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*.
[35] Durrans, "Handicrafts, Ideology and the festival of India." 21.

we see is that over time, crafts took shape through counteractive characteristics. It was skills, hand manufacturing and unchanged aesthetics -although fabricated at times- when industrialisation was leading in the opposite direction. The same authenticity that opposed industrialisation now opposed globalisation, then through fixed designs and now through its association to rural India. In all this, it is important not to forget that crafts mostly serves commercial purposes, be it a revival of design in the nineteenth century Britain, self-sustainability of the future Indian nation, or capitalist's compulsive consumption of newness, found in the ironical marketing of crafts as an return to authentic values. Similarly, Cheriyal paintings represent the authentic village culture of Telangana on paintings and a purchase may salvage its disappearance, whether marketed or not. To this date, emporia across India and craftsmen themselves repeat these very same words to their potential customers.

The AIHB took the paintings out of their local functions and shaped a discourse on these painting that serve ideological and commercial purposes for the government and the handicraft market, sometimes both at once. The very construction of this discourse and the response of Cheriyal painting to this establishment is what I called the process of institutionalisation and that we saw initiated with the intervention of the AIHB in the late 1970s. The reason why I am not attaching the study of material features of these paintings for the handicraft market is precisely because the process of institutionalisation is a discursive process that subordinates the painting to its message, and which produces paintings of very little visual interest.

2. Cheriyal paintings and Indian Aesthetics

In the following section, I look at three activities undertaken by some of the organisations presented above, that participate in this institutionalisation of Indian handicraft but this time, through particular references to already existing meaning associated with these activities. I talk about Cheriyal paintings' acquisition of a Geographical Indication tag, about the award competitions organised by the Indian central and Telangana state governments, and about workshops conducted throughout the country to promote the training skills of Indian crafts. On the one hand, I highlight

the shortcomings of government initiatives to protect the craft. On the other, I investigate Cheriyal paintings within broader Indian aesthetics.

a. **The Geographical Indication (GI) tag**

In 2010, Cheriyal paintings acquired a geographical indication (GI) tag under the name of Cheriyal Nakashi Chitrakala Trust. The Geographical Indication is an act that was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1999, for the Registration and Protection of goods in India. It is administered by the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks. The GI tag may be compared to a trademark with the difference that the patent if given to goods that originate in particular geographical area and not only to the enterprise that produce these goods. This is why the products that receive a GI tag always start with the name of the place followed by the identification of the good such as Cheriyal (location) paintings (nature of the good).[36]

According to the Geographical Indication Journal no. 35 of June 2010, the Cheriyal Nakashi Chitrakala Trust received the tag for their "paintings of art in the form of Scrolls, framed and unframed art works which may be mounted on frames," produced in "Cheriyal Village, in Jangaon Taluk of Warangal District in the State of Andhra Pradesh, in India."[37] If the characteristics described as particular to the Cheriyal paintings are rather accurate, made on "*khadi* cloth", of "large, medium and small size," and of "epic iconography" on a "red background with bright colours," the location of the practice poses some problem.[38] The tag has been attributed to Cheriyal paintings as produced in Cheriyal village and the property of this tag is particularly to discourage other craftsmen from other areas to call their paintings Cheriyal. Now as I already mentioned earlier, Vaikutam, the eldest, most awarded and recognized painter shifted his home from Cheriyal to Hyderabad in 2013. However, he continues to produce Cheriyal painting and is a member of the Trust who submitted the application for the GI tag. From the point of view of craftsmen, the GI tag serves protection against falsity and acts as a non-profit organisation that joins together the family members of the same craft. But the reality of its application questions the validity of the initiative.

[36] Kadhir Preetha, "What is the GI tag," *The Hindu* March 11, 2013 thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/what-is-the-gi-tag/article4495471.ece
[37] *Government of Indian Geographical Indications Journal* No. 34 June 4, 2010, pp. 31-37.
[38] Ibid.

The other painters of the family do not see any problem in anyone living outside Cheriyal, yet it legally goes against the very definition of a GI. Besides, it questions the status of other Cheriyal painters who did not sign the Trust but have been practicing as well. For instance, the Hyderabad-based Cheriyal artist Madhu Merugoju does not belong to the same family, neither from the same caste, he does not originate or live in Cheriyal and is not a member of the Trust. Madhu is nevertheless well recognised among the Development Commissioner, the Lepakshi Emporium and the other bodies interested in Cheriyal painting. Similar issues arise with the validity of the production made by assistants in Cheriyal. They live in Cheriyal, in the same portion of the village as the master craftsmen, and they produce the same paintings. Because they are hired by the master craftsmen themselves and produce on their demand rather than on the patrons' direct commission, they are not regarded as Cheriyal artists, and are never mentioned by neither the main painters nor the officials. In this scenario, the master craftsmen themselves act as middlemen and perturb the foundation of the GI tag. This questions the efficacy of the tag and the reality of what may be called as Cheriyal painting officially. It also questions the potential legal repercussions of such dissonance when the major benefits of the tag rely in this apparently legal protection. As per the 2015 report, the benefits of a GI tag are stated to be as follows:

> • It confers legal protection to Geographical Indications in India,
> • It prevents unauthorized use of a registered Geographical Indication by others.
> • It boosts exports of Indian Geographical indications by providing legal Protection.
> • It promotes economic Prosperity of Producers.
> • It enables seeking legal protection in other WTO member countries[39]

The two first points clearly highlight the tag's function, rapidly countered by the reality of the craft practice. As for the following three, far from being technical and provable, it is just as ambiguous as the first two. Altogether, the GI tag is born out of a genuine intention to protect handicrafts and to offer a legal dimension to a sector, which is still majorly informal. However, the craftsmen themselves, along with the officials promulgating such initiatives ignore the very rules that they have agreed to and Cheriyal painting if not most of the Indian handicrafts still remain largely unstructured and informal.

[39] *Government of Indian Geographical Indications Journal* No. 66 February 26, 2015. 26

b. **The National and State Award competitions**

The award competitions are organised by the Development Commisionner (Handicrafts), on the national level and by its regional relay on the state level. For both National and State awards, the competition starts by a shortlisting of potential awardees at the State level, a list then transferred to the national level. In theory, the DC launches a public call through newspapers, emporia and other media that artisans may encounter. More often than not, the artisans who are already listed and classified in the DC's files will receive a letter inviting them to participate. For Cheriyal painters, Vaikuntam's younger son Vinay told me that they receive a letter every year; Madhu from Hyderabad confirmed that information. As for the rest of the craftsmen, Nageshwar and his brother from Cheriyal, they all are very much aware of the dates around which the call will be launched and of the deadlines and procedures of application.

The main three Cheriyal painters, Vaikuntam, his nephew Nageshwar, and Madhu, all received either a National or State award, which probably is the reason why they are known as the master craftsmen and it is easier to meet and see their work than that of other painters of the family. In addition, Vaikuntam's son Vinay and Nageshwar's son Sai Kiran both received other types of awards for younger craftsmen, which I shall mention further down. But before I get into the significance of the award for the painters and how they respond to it, I would like to look at the assessment criteria. Bundagaard has discussed the award competition and its effect on the life of the Pattachitra painters from Orissa, and introduced her discussion with a presentation and interpretation of the criteria set for the award. [40] I would also like to introduce those criteria and comment on their meaning and problems in general rather than particularly for Cheriyal. For the National award, the assessment criteria go as follow:

> a) Excellence of craftsmanship (this can be judged from samples received along with the samples at least 4 photographs of difference stages of processing of exhibits or videography of the process of the exhibits should be submitted if possible)
> b) Related achievements (this may be judged from bio- data and other materials and Photographs of processing of others exhibits of different stages produced by the applicant.
> c) Processing of others exhibits submitted by the craftsman/sponsoring organisations.
> d) Special consideration may also be given while selecting the craftsman/weavers and the crafts to the following:
> (1) If the craft practiced is a languishing crafts.

[40] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*.

> (2) If there has been a noteworthy effort in terms of reviving a languishing craft by way of product diversification or application to contemporary use. In other words, efforts made in order to achieve a break through in the development of craft should be given due consideration.
> (3) Design innovation by the craftsmen. [41]

From the above data, one can see that however subjective, the foremost criterion for the National award is the excellence of craftsmanship and that this excellence is judged through the process of making. A serious discussion with the government officials who establish these criteria would be valuable at this stage but I unfortunately did not anticipate the importance of interpreting these while on fieldwork. What is worth noticing however are the four following criteria that all relate to the painter's 'experience' rather than the actual piece he will be proposing. As Bundagaard comments for the State award criteria of Orissa:

> "It is striking that a majority of the questions in the entry form were concerned with a possible earlier history of official recognition of the craftsmen. In common with art practice the world over, a painter who has already been admitted into an art world – who is acknowledged -is more likely to be given an award than a newcomer." [42]

It seems to me that the award assesses the craft and its status instead of the artefact or its maker. Two of these criteria take into consideration the other achievements of the painters, if they have exhibited within museums, receive important commissions, and proves of the mentions under the form or either photographs or recommendation letters, which clearly reflect the reputation of the craftsman and his craft, but mostly depend on the institutions that willed to support them. Additionally, whether the applicant has received past awards may also be taken into consideration in the evaluation of the applicant, which only insists on the importance of the preliminary institutionalisation of the craft.

The next three special attention criteria prove to be the most interesting as they refer to the state of the craft in its local context. The applicant may be rewarded if his craft is languishing or if he shows innovation in either design or contemporary adaptation of his products. These two major points are put together and seem really important with regard to the actual necessity of the craft practice, in spite of sounding contradictory. This is

[41] Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts). National awards scheme for handicrafts artisans and handloom weavers. "Guidelines for National Award 2015" Accessed August 13, 2015.
[42] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patt*, 171.

about a further question here on the compatibility of traditional design with the survival of the craft. To what extent innovation is evaluated as a positive criterion and not as one that is detrimental to the languishing craft? These are the kind of subtleties that merit further attention and for which the craftsman may not have the key at first and feel rather confused. Evidently, if the languishing craft is worth being rewarded, there is no reason for the craftsmen to strive for its survival or instead to give an accurate view of the state of their craft. For this reason, I was faced with craftsmen mourning the death of his aged old tradition while what I observed was rather different. Similarly, there is a systematic emphasis on the new products and what one may call Cheriyal visual culture such as jewellery box or paintings on sarees because these are part of what is considered worth rewarding by the national institutions therefore carrying an official and homogenous view on what craft should be. These criteria have more importance than just for the award application; they are an inherent part of the institutionalisation process that constructs a discourse around craft for potential clients. Here, it is not only constructing the image of craft to patron but to the painters themselves whose aim is to satisfy these patrons hence earn their salary. This is a complex, abstract, and indirect relationship between the institution of award and their recipient, which can be understood in simpler terms by a relationship between craftsmen and their patrons, considered as a moral and aesthetic authority to which they subordinate.

This authority is what I would like to take further now in observing the paintings proposed by the Cheriyal painters for these awards competitions and what they have to say about the subject and about Indian aesthetics. While discussing the award competitions with the Cheriyal painters, I understood that they regard these awards with great respect and envy. When I visited Vaikuntam for the first time, this is one of the first things he mentioned about his art. The award carries a degree of validity, both socially and commercially, in participating in government led programme for the revival of the craft such as training and in the increase of commissions that follow these activities. For these reasons, the pieces submitted to the award competitions are generally very fine; the painters work a lot on the conception but also on the execution of the piece, investing in material such as special brushes, anticipating what the judges may be expecting to see from the criteria that I just discussed.

Each of the awardees has received at least once an award for a miniature style painting and those who were not awarded submitted similar style miniatures as well. I have

collected three of these award paintings, each of them submitted by a different craftsman, one from the Vaikuntam for which he got National award in 1994 (Fig. 5. 4), another from his nephew Nageshwar who received State Award in 2004 (Fig. 5. 5), and another from Madhu, the trained artist from Hyderabad who received State Award in 2007 (Fig. 5. 6). The first and last have been presented in rather small format and Nageshwar in a bigger canvas but all three share the 'miniature' style of paintings.

The space of the painting is divided into registers like the Telangana scroll paintings would be; the background is red; the figures and scenes develop along registers which are separated by a floral border and encircled by a larger one. The figures, as well as both architectural and floral elements are all depicted on a very small scale and in a much finer manner, using finer brushes. Two other paintings for which I have not been able to gather photographs also follow the same miniature style. Since these paintings were all awarded, and in accordance with the award's criteria, it seems that miniature is recognised by both painters and the State as the most "excellent" form of craftsmanship.

It is particularly interesting to see that miniature painting, which is regarded as a classical and highly skilled form of Indian art is adopted and recognised here among local craftsmen. It is even more intriguing to see that the actual visual connection between the miniature as we know form the Mughal period or even the Deccani miniature for instance, has hardly anything to do with the Cheriyal miniature paintings that is in fact a translation of the Cheriyal scrolls seen for performances into a very small format. The miniature style does not carry anything else than the idea of miniature as in small depiction. The colour palette remains Cheriyal bright; the borders are still the same, the depiction of figures too. But all of this is painted in a smaller space and in smaller scale.

The continuity of miniature as a rewarded pictorial style is all the more evident in a state like Telangana where the Deccani style miniature flourished from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century and later became one of the most renowned in the country and internationally. As I discussed several times with the painters, they clearly are aware of other art forms such as miniatures, temple paintings at Lepakshi, or kalamkaris, as well as elements of history to it. They are familiar with miniature painting and have seen it several times, especially in the Salar Jung Museum collection in Hyderabad. Along with

these live samples, Vinay and Sai Kiran both attend formal art schools in Hyderabad and are trained in the subject of art history.

Yet, in spite of this clear visual knowledge and in view of the actual discordance between what is known as miniature painting within the 'official art history' and Cheriyal miniature painting, one wonders why the painters insist on calling it a miniature. This may refer once more to the connotation that miniature carries as a fine style of painting, well-recognised by officials, museums and any other institutions or private consumer in India and abroad. If the painters seem to be using this idea of miniature for their own promotion, it also includes miniature to the realm of craft and to the craft market in which it is located. Furthermore, it creates a trend of miniature paintings for award that may homogenise the Cheriyal craft under the style of miniature instead of acknowledging its versatility. But apart from the consideration of value for the miniature painting genre, the paintings submitted for these awards are indeed masteries of craftsmanship and the capacity to convert the style of Telangana scrolls into a 'miniature' proves convincing for a "languishing art" that includes "innovation" in an "excellent" piece.

Apart from Vaikuntam's 1994 National award that depicted the story of Daksha from the Shiva Purana (Fig. 5. 4), both Nageshwar's and Madhu depicted episodes of the Krishna Lila (Fig. 5. 5 and 5. 6). Nageshwar even chose to replace the usual Cheriyal floral border with a complex depiction of figures playing dandiya sticks in line as the encircling device for the painting. For their award submissions, painters chose to depict pan-Indian mythological scenes and stories well known by everyone rather than the caste mythologies they specialise in. The possible explanation for this is that while working for Indian officials and the state or national patron, painters prefer turning to a better-known iconography, anticipating once again that it would appeal more to the judges. The origin of these assumptions cannot be fixed in time but painting other subjects than the caste Puranas initially started as an enlargement of subjects and a response to their increasing popularity among handicrafts lovers, later probably extended to government officials. The popularity of pan-Indian mythologies encouraged the craftsmen to choose these subjects instead of the old-fashioned caste Puranas, which to a certain extent homogenise the iconography of the country's crafts to pan-Indian subjects. It is fairly common to find the same pan-Indian subjects in other craft

paintings from other regions as well for the same reason, which I develop towards the end of this chapter.

Forms of art favoured by those who institutionalised them have long been influencing Indian aesthetics and these are carried forward through the translation of Cheriyal painting into miniatures of pan-Indian iconography. This process questions the difference made between art and craft, between miniature which are viewed by museum and cultural institutions as Indian art, and Cheriyal painting viewed as handicraft. It also questions the relation between what is 'art' and what is skilled work. Until today the greatest collections of Indian art within museums comprise both sculptures and miniature paintings. The validation of a miniature style folk painting as that of excellent craftsmanship only emphasises this assumption, associating skill to what has always been seen as skilful. As for the 'pan-indianisation' of the iconography, there is a feeling of modernity here that painters respond to with these changes. The homogenisation of India's religious discourse as part of the country's politics is understood and translated within the most localised craft, and in associating recognition to the delivery of an award. Both the recognised – and awarded - style and iconography work towards an institutionalised definition of what is the 'best' Indian craft, which clearly sustains and reinforces already existing judgement on what defines Indian Aesthetics.

Craftsmen value these awards and work with great care towards the making of the paintings they will be submitting. They invest money, time and pay particular attention to the finesse and skills placed in the paintings. They take great pride in these technical skills. Apart from the pictorial aspects, the awards are also financial rewards to the painters. National awardees currently (2015) receive one lakh rupees (£1000) while the Kamaladevi Award for young craftsmen as well as the Kala Nidhi Award for the best artisan of the yearly Surajkund Mela in Haryana both offer 25000 rupees (£250). This financial dimension is very important to craftsmen who are not yet stable in their activity. Finally, these awards also have greater networking implications. Those who receive the award will receive more commissions and more support form the emporia associated to the DC of each district. They will also be named forward for workshops or any other activity on the national level. Awards become a mark of recognition in the handicraft world, which will consequently impact private patrons in search of the best craftsman. All this makes the award competition a very serious moment of the

craftsmen's professional development who will then become a master. Subsequently, it relegates those who did not ever receive any award to a secondary position.

Sanjay Kathuria in *Indian Handicraft Exports: Constraints and Prospects* talked about the reception of award and the subsequent title of 'master' that encouraged craftsmen but led to competition as well.[43] This is illustrated among the Cheriyal artists. Vaikuntam has received the most numerous amounts of awards of all three families. In spite of not being awarded with many certificates, Madhu's innovative style and his favours from a few important people provided him with continuous and stable amounts of commissions. Unfortunately, Nageshwar's family and particularly his two younger brothers have not yet received any award and are unknown to the general public, private patrons, museums, and the state. I also enquired about the process of application for these award competitions and Vaikuntam's son Rakesh explained me that they were generally invited to participate directly, and that the State Award would always be given to them due to the absence of other craftsmen in competition for the painting section.[44] The competition seems to be taking place among craftsmen of the same tradition rather than among different traditions. It seems to be working as a cycle where only known craftsmen can be rewarded and where only the rewarded may be known. This brings the question of homogenisation further to the painters themselves, where only the ones fitting the principles cited above, may be awarded, therefore continue their tradition. The side effect will discard other craftsmen due to a lack of commission and a lack of advertisement, closing the cycle onto the discourse on extinguishing crafts and its translation as one criterion to the award competitions.

c. **Workshops**

In May 2014, I attended a workshop on Cheriyal painting at 'Our Sacred Space' in Secunderabad, conducted by Sai Kiran Nakashi, son of Nageshwar. 'Our Sacred Space' is a small centre dedicated to arts and crafts in general. It is composed of several small opened buildings, all around an outdoors courtyard. The houses resemble mud houses like in a rural setting. The atmosphere is calm and relaxed, in the middle of the city buzz. It hosts workshops on theatre, performance, dance and paintings, as well as

[43] Kathuria, Sanjay. *Indian Handicraft Exports: Constraints and Prospects*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 1988.
[44] 26/07/2014

organic food markets, exhibitions and talks. Nagesh Rao's social entrepreneurship company contacted Sai Kiran and offered him to conduct a series of workshop at 'Our Sacred Space.' The one I attended was on a Sunday and started at ten in the morning and lasted for around three hours.

Cheriyal painting was first introduced with a short history and then, each participant had the chance to paint a Cheriyal painting on a small piece of cloth. The making of a painting is divided into four steps. First, one defines the frame of his painting and draws the outline of the scene he intends to depict. After that, the red background colour is applied twice or thrice depending on the expected opacity. The figures and borders are then coloured and finally, one draws the black line around the figures and paints the eyes.

There were seven participants on the day I attended the workshop. All were seated on a chair in front of a table counter. We were given small square canvas, already prepared to receive a sketch and colours, pencils, watercolours and brushes. Sai Kiran was present throughout the workshop and helped the participants completing their paintings. Nagesh Rao also walked around to ask the participants about their special interest for this particular workshop, and to gather feedback on the activity he organised. The small crowd of participants was varied. Among them was an artist interested in learning different painting styles and techniques. She was good at drawing and could take the liberty to innovate in her piece. There were also two ladies who were very enthusiastic at first but quickly left the workshop for the more interesting organic food market in the courtyard, leaving their paintings to Sai Kiran's professional touch and picking them up at the end of the workshop. Finally, there were a few children and me.

This workshop was relaxed and experienced as leisure by most participants. At the end, one can leave with his souvenir painting and some self-satisfaction of having completed a 'real' Cheriyal painting. Through the actual practice for three hours, I was able to understand the difficulties in painting even the smallest and less fine of all Cheriyal painting. Drawing the black lines and painting the eyes, which is the final touch that gives Cheriyal painting its identity is probably the most difficult task as the hands need to flow on the shapes and be continuous, which was far from being the case for most of the participants. The participants gain knowledge of the technicalities of the craft too. Unfortunately, these workshops are short, which cannot provide a full account of what

the paintings really are, but the participants get a sense of what the practice is and learn something deeply regional. The space is rural and peaceful, the teaching is authentic, the teacher, teaching material and pupil's production too. From the red background to the black lines and the borders, the real Cheriyal painting unfolds its making process to the participants who finally understands the tradition from experience. This is also a chance for the artist to network and meet with potential patrons, which I approach in Chapter 7 in the context of one private commission.

The American Institute of Indian Studies runs an immersed summer school in several Indian languages. As part of the Telugu four-month course in Hyderabad, the convenor Vimala Katikaneni organised a workshop on Cheriyal paintings as a leisure activity during the summer school. There were four American students and the goal was to participate in local cultural activities, as they would learn Telugu. In May 2014, I attended one session of this workshop at Vaikuntam's home in Hyderabad. Initially scheduled in Osmania University, the session I attended took place at Vaikuntam's home due to changes in the university's room availability. Vaikuntam trained the four participants twice a week for several weeks on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The students were graduates willing to spend time in India to learn a different language and be immersed in a different culture. Vimala teaches Telugu for the Institute and is particularly interested in craft and local culture that she promotes abroad. She knew Vaikuntam personally as she commissioned work from him and wrote a couple of newspaper articles on Cheriyal paintings as well. She arranged for timings, as well as for including the workshop as part of the syllabus of the summer course.

The teaching followed exactly the same pattern as Sai Kiran's and after a short history and information on the technique of the canvas and paints, Vaikuntam would teach the outlines, the red background, filling in the colours, the borders and the black lines, and finally the painting of the eyes. Vaikuntam does not speak English and Vimala translated everything that he explained, in spite of the students having to practice their Telugu; the focus here was on learning the painting technique and having a good time. As at 'Our Sacred Space,' the students could leave with a painting essentially Cheriyal: small and portable, red in the background with bright colours in contrast, outlined with black thick line and bordered with flowery motifs.

Along with these ‘private’ workshops, organised by companies or institutions that do not involve the State, Cheriyal painters regularly conduct workshops in the art-related museums or cultural centres. The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) Bhopal, the Jaipur Monsoon festival, the Salar Jung museum in Hyderabad, the Thanjavur South Zone Cultural Centre, the Lalit Kala Akademi Chennai, the Bangalore Chitrakala Parishath, and DakshinaChitra near Chennai among others, all invited the Cheriyal artists to teach their practice and disseminate their skills. Each of these workshops, along with Sai Kiran’s and Vaikuntam’s, teaches Cheriyal painting as seen in the Lepakshi emporia. They depict popular Krishna stories on a rough canvas painted with a red background and floral borders, all this in bright synthetic colours that are said to be natural.

Non-governmental organisations (NGO) may also organise workshops, gather funding and pay the craftsmen to train marginalised people. I attended such workshop funded by ALEAP in June 2014 that Nageshwar and his wife both conducted in Cheriyal during forty days. They trained women who have been previously selected by an NGO, to the making of Cheriyal painting. The workshop had a proper syllabus, women received a payment and the study material was included. Here the teaching followed similar steps as the others but because of its longer duration, pupils can practise the technique at length and learn with precision from the teaching. The contextual detail and what we may call ‘theory’ does not exist beyond the mere explanation of the origin or the painting in less than five minutes on the first day. The making of the cloth, its coating and polishing techniques, along with the making of natural pigments are not part of the syllabus either. Instead, the workshop focuses on drawing and colouring, the steps of Cheriyal practice that will give them their final look. Pupils therefore learn the sketching, outlining, drawing the figures, colouring and its conventions etc.

Both Nageshwar and his wife Padma supervised the workshop and walked around the students to check their progress and advice on possible improvements (Fig. 5. 7). At times too, Sai Kiran would help if he was in the village. The workshop took place the courtyard of a house in the compound of the Cheriyal painters and around thirty women were trained. They sat on the floor with their sketchbooks and pencils and throughout the day, repeated the same exercise depending planned by the syllabus, be it sketching or colouring (Fig. 5. 8). They would receive food and a daily stipend and go home to their families at the end of the afternoon. The goal was to train women to have a skill to

work and help sustaining the family. For the painters, it may allow them to find out new potential assistants. One of the women currently working with them was trained during such workshop. She was present in that workshop too, painting a scroll on the side while the pupils were rehearsing their practice.

d. *Guru*-pupil apprenticeship and innovation

The teaching methods of all these workshops follow the ancient Hindu apprenticeship system of *guru*-pupil relation also known as *gurukula* (a form of boarding school). It involves the teaching of a master over a pupil until the latter is trained enough to take upon the tradition and the teaching himself. The Cheriyal painters themselves were trained under this method by their fathers or uncles. The new generations of painters, both Vaikuntam's sons Rakesh and Vinay, and Nageshwar's sons Sai Kiran and Pavan were trained with that method, learning from observing their fathers and reproducing the separate steps one after the other until they could be independently working.

This teaching method may be repetitive and limit innovation at first but while asking the painters themselves, they do not see possible innovation without mastery and both seem to work together, the latter as a subsequent skill of the former. All agree to consider the pictorial convention of a Cheriyal painting to be the foremast skill to acquire and do not actually consider these conventions as limiting but instead, as a repertoire of forms, colours and lines to carry on further on different support or design, and definitely as the foundation to their art.

This method is also what they use as they teach American students or upper class urban ladies. Those are interested in learning about local culture, which has everything to do with these strict conventions transmitted through the *gurukula* method and less with innovation. Showing innovative capacity at such workshop would dilute the intention of showing how traditional one culture may be and especially not how global and responsive it could be. As for the NGOs workshop, the intention being to increase women employment and work towards the Cheriyal craft's continuity, the teaching needs to be practical and convey these technical skills that attendees may take further at their own liberty. Contextualisation is not necessary here as it is about learning a skill, a technical skill to improve one's incomes. These workshops may be divided into

subsection depending on whom the training is dedicated to. But overall, craftsmen are comfortable in this method of teaching from which they themselves learnt and which does not interfere in any way with the modern clients from urban Hyderabad or America as both have come to learn the local craft. In addition to the actual object, they also leave the workshop having experienced the traditional ways of learning, which certainly contributes to the image of these paintings as traditional.

These workshops are a source of income for the painters and painters acknowledged their increasing numbers in the last twenty years. Yet, if painters tend not to refuse any project or commission, these workshops are not exactly introduced as a great achievement by Vaikuntam, neither it is by Nageshwar and Padma who conducted the most recent one for the village women. For them, these workshops are very demanding and poorly paid. Sai Kiran told me that they work with a package and the amount of money provided by the NGO or the state has to be redistributed for material, food and every expense of the apprentices. Whatever money remains can then be theirs.[45] Their awareness of the social dimension of these initiatives and the minor income does not allow them to refuse and they usually take up these projects.

Depending on the commissioning body, the workshop will be conducted by one particular painter or the other. Vaikuntam is the eldest and most recognised Cheriyal painter, hence easily accessible for people from abroad like the American Institute. On the other side, the younger Sai Kiran trains the local urbanites at 'Our Sacred Space' because of Nagesh Rao who himself, preferred working with younger and potentially more innovative but less-known craftsmen than those who are well recognised and who according to him are too 'money-oriented.'[46] Finally, Nageshwar usually conducts the projects organised by NGOs mostly in the rural context of Cheriyal where he lives and works.

e. **Conclusion**

The competition that takes place within the craft, notably due to the award, but also maintained through the division of teaching among the members of the craft, may indicate a failure of the handicraft initiatives towards development and employment.

[45] 10/07/2014 Discussion with Sai Kiran
[46] 17/05/2014 Conversation with Nagesh Rao

Madhu who has been trained by his uncle who himself received Vaikuntam's training is now considered by Vaikuntam as a competitor and not recognised as a Cheriyal artist by most of the family members. Madhu has learnt the main painting techniques, but he showed me once a scroll he and his uncle painted together which not at all matching what Vaikuntam or Nageshwar may produce. Instead, Madhu developed many personal and innovative devices, probably helped by the very distance he was forced to maintain from the hierarchical and conventional way of painting in Cheriyal. This innovation, along with his marginalisation, owed him the favours of few important people among them representatives at the Salar Jung museum for which he delivered workshops a couple of times in the early 2000s. Apart from this, Vaikuntam and Nageshwar's children benefited from the overall revival of Cheriyal painting too. Along with their home learning, they are now receiving formal education in fine arts as well, which would have not been possible without the financial improvement of their fathers.

Keeping this in mind, the initial teaching learning under the *gurukula* system may reflect a conservative and restrictive way of learning hence counterproductive to the maintenance of the craft. Yet, the award competition, in altering the painters' relationship with each other, may be more damaging to the survival of the craft and its variety, in choosing who and what should be rewarded and therefore recognised as Cheriyal. In fact, both the award and workshop reflect a deeper functional structure within the Cheriyal craft production, which is that of the relationship between craftsmen as family members. The structure indeed has defects but that so far has not created more tensions than mere financial jealousy and neither of those has altered this structure so greatly that it may threatened the existence of either of these painters. The GI tag comes as an addition to this in actually preventing from further inclusion of craftsmen without the preliminary approval of the now Cheriyal Trust, which – as far as it is implemented – seem to be acting in good complementarity with the other two initiatives.

Finally, the miniature paintings of the Ramayana and Krishna Lila presented for the award, as well as the authentic Cheriyal monoscenic depiction of Krishna or Rama's marriage with Sita taught in workshops, both partake in the homogenising processes undertaken by the Government and its relay in the market. This is of course not isolated to Cheriyal painting and other Indian craft painting have experienced similar homogenisation through similar processes, leading to the construction of new categories or genres of Indian painting, which I shall talk about now.

3. **Pata painting as a New genre of Indian painting**

In the early 1930s, Gurusaday Dutt, a civil servant in the Bengal Presidency of British India (present-day West Bengal, Bihar and Bangladesh), developed an interest and started collecting scroll paintings of the Patuas, painters and performers of moralising and mythological stories. In 1932, he exhibited the paintings known as *pat* Paintings for the first time at the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta.[47] Two years later in 1934, he exhibited them again at Visva Bharati in Santiniketan, which Rabindranath Tagore had founded in 1921, as an 'art' school based on Indian teaching and aesthetics in response to the contemporary colonial art schools. In the Nationalist decades that followed, Dutt among others wrote extensively on Bengali folklore, including the Patuas' paintings.[48] By the time Dutt started collecting *pat* paintings in the 1930s in Bengal, they were in a state of decline.[49] The popularity of theatre in Calcutta in the nineteenth century, and cinema from the early 1910s had weakened the interest for folk entertainment and led the Patuas to shift to urban areas and adopt new themes for their stories.[50]

Between 1952 and 1955, Philip and Halina Zealey came to Orissa for a development project under a Quaker organisation, and resided at Puri. There, they discovered a tradition of paintings on cloth known as *pattachitras*, made for pilgrims visiting the famous Jagannath temple in Puri. Halina took great interest in these paintings and participated in reviving the tradition. Her efforts led to the state government's approval in 1953, for the opening of an emporium for marketing Orissan handicraft. As it were the case for the *pat* paintings in Bengal, when Halina Zealey visited Danda Sahi and Raghurajpur where *pattachitras* were produced for the pilgrims at Puri, the production had long suffered the popularity of cheaper prints and painting had become a side activity for painting families who had then turned to agricultural profession.

In 1954 and 1955, itinerant storytellers visited the home of Jagdish Mittal in Hyderabad. At both instances the performers used paintings in their narration, which triggered J.

[47] Hauser, Beatrix. "From Oral Tradition to "Folk Art": Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings." *Asian Folklore Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002). 112.
[48] Ghosh, Pika. "The Story of a Storyteller's Scroll." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 37 (2000): 166-85, 176-7.
[49] Ghosh Pika. "Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2003), 864
[50] Ibid.

Mittal's curiosity. A few years later in 1960s and with the help of Venkatramaiah Nakashi, painter in the nearby village of Cheriyal, he collected his first scrolls known as Cheriyal *patam*. Until now, Mittal has the most important collection of Cheriyal scrolls and a number of publications about the subject on his name. While in the 1960s when Mittal acquired his first scrolls in the 1960s, there were several painting centres across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. By the time Venkatramaiah Nakashi died in 1976, only one family (constituted of several brothers and cousins) was painting in Cheriyal.[51]

Following their decline and subsequent rediscovery by important collectors in different part of India, all three painting forms received interest from the government and development-related agencies. In 1952, Independent India founded the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB), to look after the development and progress of Indian handicrafts, which I presented earlier. In the 1970s, NGOs, with the help of the AIHB, set foot into Bengali folklore and intervened in the sustainability of the craftsmen's activities. They encouraged the tradition's renewal through the introduction of new themes of development related propaganda.[52] In 1986 and 1991, the Handicraft Board of West Bengal organised for the first times workshops in the village of Naya in West Bengal to improve the techniques of painting and revive the craft. Some time between 1985 and 1987, and as an initiative of the AIHB, Venkatramaiah's son Vaikuntam Nakashi, trained fifty men in Cheriyal in their painting techniques. In 1987, the chief minister of Orissa declared officially Raghurajpur as a 'Crafts Village,' turning it into a major touristic attraction. Finally, in 1992, the private Crafts Council of Bengal organised a workshop on *pat* paintings at the Asutosh Museum of Calcutta University, and in 2007, Madhu Merugoju was presenting Cheriyal painting at a workshop organised by the Salar Jung museum in Hyderabad.

These are only a few of the activities in which craftsmen from the respective regions participated in but their mention alongside each other reflects the similar chronology that all underwent: decline, revival and changes in the traditions of *pat* Painting from West Bengal, *pattachitras* from Orissa, and Cheriyal *patam* from Telangana. These similar developments in three different regions have culminated in the handicraft market

[51] Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*, 15.
[52] Korom, Frank J. "Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal." *Asian Ethnology* 70, no. 2 (2011).

- through the State - slowly turning into the first and foremost patron of these three folk traditions since the 1950s.

a. The Bengali *pat*, Orissan *pattachitra*, and Cheriyal *patam* (Fig. 5. 9, 5. 10, and 5. 11)

As with other folk tradition, tracing the origin of the Bengali *pat*, of the Cheriyal *patam* and of the Orissan *pattachitra* is difficult and uncertain. But perhaps their origin is not what is important here. When Dutt, Zealey and Mittal started collecting these paintings, each of these objects had a particular function within the local environment in which they were produced. The *pat* paintings from Bengal were – and still are to a certain extent - scrolls that narrate local mythologies and moralising stories. The painters and performers of these stories, called Patuas or Chitrakars would wander around with their painting and receive alms for their storytelling.[53] Cheriyal *patam* paintings share with the Bengali *pat* the storytelling dimension and their function as an aid to performance, which I have introduced in the previous two chapters. However, unlike the Bengali *pat*, the painters are not performers and both professions are divided. As for the *pattachitras* from Orissa, they do not have a narrative dimension attached to them but share the religious affiliation instead, as they were - and still are - painted for pilgrims to worship in memory of their visit to the Jagannath temple at Puri. These respective functions have not ceased and the craftsmen of each tradition continue producing these particular paintings for their local patrons with their particular format, support, technique, iconography and uses.

However, while visiting craft *melas* or emporia across India, very little remains of what these paintings were when they were rediscovered between the 1930s and the 1960s. The emergence of a common and overshadowing patron for the Bengali *pat*, the Orissan *pattachitra* and the Cheriyal *patam* has homogenised their materiality and transformed their function, gathering them together under one of their common feature which is the cloth on which they are painted, and from which they gained the generic appellation of 'Pata painting'. While visiting the Dilli Haat in Delhi or its counterpart in Hyderabad Shilparamam, one will come across a variety of Pata paintings. Apart from the Bengali *pat*, the Cheriyal *patam*, and the Orissan *pattachitra*, one may encounter other types of

[53] For more information on the evolution of the name from Patuas to chitrakar, see Hauser "From Oral Tradition to 'Folk Art.'"

painting called by the name of their locale and made on cloth too such as Madhubani paintings from Bihar for instance. However, if there may be a stall or two of Cheriyal *patam,* it is the Bengali *pat* and the Orissan *pattachitras* that occupy most space. For this reason I chose to look at these two in comparison with the third one from Cheriyal because of the subject of this PhD. I will compare the features these three paintings now share to highlight the process of homogenisation that followed their entry to the market.

b. **Pata paintings' materiality**

The first common features of Pata paintings are their size and format. Usually, these paintings would be no less than 20 x 20 centimetres and no more than 205 x 100 centimetres. Of course, these are generic dimensions and it may vary on demand to the craftsmen but these are rather standard formats of the paintings that one finds at crafts fairs, handicraft emporia or on the walls of staircases and government office. These must be easy to carry for both the artisans who may be coming from far away with their painting to the market, and for the buyers who are coming to take it away and decorate their home. In their local context of performance, the Bengali *pat* paintings usually range from 350 to 500 centimetres in length and 60 centimetres in width. They are carried as rolled scrolls that will be unfolded during the performance, akin to the Cheriyal scrolls. The latter have much larger size ranging from 10 to 25 meters long and 80 to 100 centimetres wide. It is difficult to give a general evaluation of the *pattachitras* outside the handicraft market as they have always partly served the tourist / pilgrims market hence experienced less variation in size and format. Overall, the three Pata paintings share the same range of sizes and rather calibrated square or rectangle format that unifies them all on the market.

This adds to what I introduced as the feature that gathers them together under the name Pata, which is the cloth on which they are painted. The cotton cloth chosen to become the support of the painting, its coating and polishing processes will vary from one region to the other, depending on the availability of natural resources in the area and on the crafstmen' tradition. The Cheriyal *patam* were khadi and later mill-made cloth, coated three times with a paste made of starch of boiled rice, white clay, edible gum, and tamarind seed paste. This coat is then polished with a stone before the paint may be applied. A similar process follows for the *pattachitras* with the difference that here,

several layers of clothes are pasted together with glue made of tamarind so that the cloth is thick and resistant. A coat of glue and chalk mixed is then applied onto the cloth and polished with the help of stones.[54] Finally, the *pat* is made of several layers of papers that painters then recover with a cloth, coat and polish. At present, the 'cloths' used for Pata paintings in the market all rarely are more than one layer of cotton, quickly coated once with either a mixture of chalk and other powders or synthetic gesso base bought in the bazaar. At times too, painters directly use thick paper or other support like raw silk that does not require any preparation.[55]

Apart from size and support, these small paintings on cloth all follow similar painting techniques too. Painters of the three traditions share steps in the process of painting. They start by sketching the outline of the figures, followed by filling up the background, dispatching the colours, paint details and borders, paint the black outlines and finally the eyes. The figures and colours are bold, saturated, the line around them is accentuated by a black circling that may vary from thin (*patam* and *pattachitras*) to thick (*pat*), the background is often bright and the frame of the cloth surrounded by a decorative border. The natural colours that were used decades ago varied once again depending on the local resources but have all been replaced by gouache, at times blend with local natural gum that still remains cheaper than the market one without demanding too much time for preparation.

c. **Pata paintings' iconography**

In terms of iconography, each tradition has its particularity. The painters of Bengali *pat* are known as Patuas or Chitrakar and their religious affiliation is ambiguous, shifting from Islam and Hinduism through a series of conversions from one to the other throughout history.[56] Because of their flexible religious identity, they depict and narrate mythological and religious stories from both religions. Along with these religious stories, they also perform moralising folk stories as part of local modes of education. This results in having an imagery of major Hindu deities such as Durga who is particularly popular in the Bengal region, along with Muslim saints and regular village

[54] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patt*, 20.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Hauser "From Oral Tradition to 'Folk Art,'" 110-4.

folks. The iconography of the *pattachitras* is much more restricted and revolves around the sacred triad of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra as well as images of the Jagannath temple at Puri that host the three deities. Finally, the subject of Cheriyal scrolls is the local caste Puranas, the narratives of occupational caste that results in the depiction of major pan-Indian Hindu deities with minor local deities and sages (r*ishis*) and local village folk in their respective occupations.

In addition to these three particular iconographical themes, another now takes part of the identity of Pata paintings. Since their entry to the handicraft market, there has been a growing interest for the pan-Indian Hindu, mostly Vaishnavite iconography, especially for the representation of the gods Rama and Krishna as well as the series of Vishnu's avatars. But if it is fairly common to see the 'original' iconography of the *pat* and *pattachitra* on sale on their respective market stalls or emporium shelves, nowhere in the handicraft outlets one finds the Cheriyal caste Puranas. The situation here is rather different for all three traditions and it is important to acknowledge the difference.

The Orissan *pattachitras* usually depict Jagannath and its temple as part of a living religious practice that might have initiated locally, for which Jagannath might have been a tribal god but that is recognised until now as an avatar of Krishna. Puri is considered one of the major pilgrimage centres in the country. Therefore, the theme may be depicted for sale to domestic and foreign tourists who do not necessarily know or have visited Orissa but may nevertheless hold a certain awareness of the iconographic tradition through the relative widespread of the religious practice. Besides, the style of a *pattachitra* is usually that of painted icons, produced for home worship after a visit to the Jagannath temple. The Jagannath triad or the temple map are depicted frontally, both offering a greater decorative dimension than narrative paintings. In contrast, the Bengali *pat* tradition have a narrative dimension that served the performative function of the scrolls and that imposes narration of a certain length and a sequence or continuity of painted scenes that work together. Both Bengali *pat* and *pattachitras* responded to new themes through the intervention of institutional agencies that encouraged the development of social themes among other new designed features. The Bengali *pat* were supported by NGOs as Frank Korom presented in *Civil Ritual, NGOs, and rural mobilization in Mediniput District, West Bengal*, and could face competition in

depicting themes for the purpose of education and development propaganda.[57] Government health campaign in cooperation with the State Handicrafts Design Centre in Orissa proposed similar iconographical introduction for the *pattachitras.*[58] This capacity of adapting themes and depict current news and world issues is what Korom, with regards to the Bengali *pat,* calls the Patuas's journalism.[59] It worked well in the favour of the promotion of the *pat* and *pattachitra* and in finding a new audience and market for them.

The Cheriyal scrolls depict a deeply rooted and narrative iconography, for which the stories are unknown to most of the people, including the painters themselves. This is of course problematic while transferring these paintings on to small marketable pieces of cloth. But this is probably not the only problem here. This very same narrative and rooted iconography is also the iconography of lower castes Hindus seeking for asserting their status, as I explained in Chapter 2. This is highly particularised and probably not deemed representative of a constructed Indian folklore that the handicraft market is promoting through these Pata painting. For these reasons, Cheriyal painting as one sees them in the handicraft market have been institutionalised as depicting Ramayana and Krishna iconographies. Unlike the Bengali *pat* or the Orissan *pattachitra* which have both adopted the Vaishnavite iconography and secular social themes along their own particular one and increased their variety of themes for the market over time, the Cheriyal scroll had to erase their local iconography and replace it with the constructed pan-Indian Rama and Krishna stories as they entered the market. This is emphasised by the marketing discourse that tends to present Cheriyal painting in brochures and emporia' advertisements as depicting mythological stories like the Ramayana and the Krishna Lila, omitting the mention of caste's mythologies. At rare instance, the mention of the past iconography may be made but only to reinforce the consequential association between the rooted iconography and its disappearance.

Overall, the iconography of the homogenised category of Pata painting usually are pan-Indian religious icons such as Ganesha or the trimurti Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, along with narratives of the Ramayana and the Krishna Lila. These are best depicted as single frontal icons, popular across India and popularised with the mass production of printed

[57] Korom, "Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal."
[58] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patt,* 20. 142.
[59] Korom, "Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal."182.

calendars,[60] or in the design shape of 'story-painting.'[61] 'Story-paintings' may be compared to cartoon booklets and usually depict one major scene surrounded by side related scenes.[62] This allows at the same time a highly decorative and balanced composition, and a summarised narrative dimension. The painters of Bengali *pat* and Cheriyal *patam* are familiar with pictorial narratives as their painting form is initially defined through the concordance of visual and oral narrative; but that was not the case for the *pattachitra.* In her study of *pattachitra,* Bundgaard convincingly attributes the inclusion of 'story painting' design in *pattachitras* to Jagannatha Das, Chief Designer of the Design Centre at Bhubaneshwar in the 1960s, and acknowledged its popularity.[63] Conjonctly, both Bengali and Cheriyal Pata have turned their lengthy and chronological narrative to more synthetic and concise 'story paintings', and gained popularity with this design too. While *pattachitras* included a narrative dimension to their iconic depictions, the Bengali *pat* and Cheriyal *patam* both opted for a more balanced and frontal narrative, therefore unifying all three under the format of 'story painting.'

This is best reflected in the large amount of painting of Rama and Sita's wedding found in emporia and craft fairs, as well as those of Krishna's life especially the Lila (dance with the gopis). The marriage of Rama and Sita may propose the wedding as the central scene, with key episodes of the Ramayana prior to the marriage revolving around. Fig. 5. 12 for instance is such 'story painting' of Rama and Sita's wedding painted by Madhu for the Ram Katha Museum in Ayodhya. It measures around 45 x 60 centimetres. The episodes around the marriage are all taken from the Bala Kaanda Book one of Valmiki's Ramayana and depicted chronologically from the top left to the bottom right: 1) An image of Ganesha; 2) the visit of the sage Vishwamitra to Rama's father Dasaratha to ask for protection from his sons Rama and Laxmana; 3) Dasaratha's sons Laxman and Rama sent to the forest to protect the sages; 4) Thataki attacking Rama and Laxman on their way to the forest; 5) Vishwamitra receiving the invitation for Sita's marriage; 6) Rama and Laxman protecting the fire sacrifice from demons; 7) Rama breaking Ahalya's curse of being a tone by touching the stone with his foot; 8) and finally Rama and Sita's marriage.

[60] Inglis, S. "Master, Machine, and Meaning: Printed Images in Twentieth-Century India." 1999.
[61] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patt*, 20. 148.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

This theme, along with the Krishna Lila is particularly popular among foreign tourists too whose overall knowledge of Indian religions is that of Hinduism and particularly Vaishnavite. Occasionally however, one may find what the painters call 'village scenes' that depict farming, fruit fetching or any land related activity (Fig. 5. 1). As I found similar rural scenes in the caste narrative scrolls, particularly that of the Mudiraj who are engaged in land work and farming, I initially thought of the development of this iconography as a secular extract from the caste Puranas' scrolls. But, the presence of similar themes in both Bengali *pat* and Orissan *pattachitra* may instead indicate a secularisation of iconography and an emphasis on 'village life' as part of the exotification of Indian folklore and crafts.

d. **The process of production**

Due to the high demand for Pata paintings by the handicraft market, these small square paintings are much quicker to produce and usually less fine than the longer scrolls from which they originate.[64] Their primary function is to be sold, at the local craft *melas*, the state and national handicraft emporia, and both domestic and international tourist's market. This is particularly important for the features that they all share in their productions as well.

The master painter may sketch the outlines of the paintings and other family members, assistants, or anyone who does not have a direct training in the craft can complete the rest. In this production of a commodity, the painters do not seek for personal recognition, but for sale and incomes, so does the market. Several times, I have seen Vaikuntam Nakash sketching the outlines of the small paintings for the Lepakshi Emporium, and giving it to his sons for filling up the colours. In Cheriyal, I met with these two families of assistants, hired by the main Cheriyal painters, one for making masks and one for making these small paintings. The Cheriyal craft is not represented by a lot of artisans; only three families hold the ownership. Even on such a small scale, they felt the need to hire two assistants to keep producing these small tourist paintings so that the masters could then concentrate on other more lucrative commissions. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that these assistants are not recognised as

[64] In the context of the Bengali pat, Ghosh, "Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal," talks about the distinction between *jarano* (rolled scrolls) and *chauka* (square) paintings. 844.

Cheriyal artist by anyone, neither buyers, nor institutions, and do not take part in any recognition process or activities such as the award competition for instance. They are merely employees.

When I visited the crafts village of Raghurajpur in January 2015, where numerous painters of Orissan *pattachitra* live, I was not able to differentiate assistants from the 'original', the 'trained,' and the 'trading' painters but almost each house in the village sells *pattachitras.* These are either made directly by the painter who lives in the house or acquired from one of them and brought back to another middleman's house. Bundgaard, in her thorough social study of the *pattachitra* approached the question of middlemen and explains that after their revival, the *pattachitra* saw the increase of people who would settle in Raghurajpur, buy paintings from a craftsman and sell it himself as if he were the artist.[65] This indicates a further emphasis on the quick, commoditisation of the *pattachitra*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to observe the situation myself in Bengal but the well-covered scholarship, the wide participation of Patuas to almost every craft *mela*, and the popularity of these paintings online and almost everywhere in India suggest that a large amount of artisans are working on the Bengali *pat* tradition, creating a similar sense of 'mass' hand production of the paintings.

e. **A definition for Pata paintings**

If we agree to say that buyers of Pata paintings do not prioritise the finesse of the painting or the identity of the painters, what do they then look for while acquiring a Pata painting? This is where the idea of authenticity plays an important role and merits further attention. Pata paintings are metonymies of an authentic craft. They carry the historical dimension of traditional practice, and flavours of an authentic village craft that does not necessitate identifying the producer of the painting or a refined sketching. Yet, the fast and large production of paintings displayed to visitors of crafts emporium and *melas* rather give a sense that they might have been mass produced and surely not 'unique.' In *Authenticity, Repetition and the Aesthetics of Seriality The work of Tourist art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Christopher B. Steiner locates authenticity

[65] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patt*, 50.

not only in "originality but in redundancy" too.[66] He explains that the accumulation and repetition of the same object in the eyes of the potential buyer who has in mind a constructed notion of authenticity might offer an assurance that these adhere to his views. It would comfort the buyer's choice.

In this environment, and as Philips and Steiner agreed while presenting the concept of authenticity in the introduction of *Unpacking Culture, Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial World*, "the solution to defining the authentic it of an object circulating in the networks of world art exchange lies not in the properties of the object itself but in the very process of collection."[67] Essentially created within the realm of a commodity, authenticity becomes discursive and makes redundant the search for its specific visual translations as much as the quest for a potential original way of painting. Instead, the identity and authenticity of the traditional Pata paintings is conducted through epitomic features to be found on each of them, such as the rough cloth support, the bold and stylised figures, the bright, saturated and contrasted colours, the 'story painting' format, and the pan-Indian - understood Hindu - iconography. These are authentic features as formulated by the market, on the basis of the customers' demands, and hardly questioned by the painters.

In the above mention article, Steiner also talks about the sweat marks on the inner part of an African mask that is "a sign that the mask has been 'danced," therefore increasing tourists' attraction for the 'authentic' object.[68] We could see similar clues in the quick and rough sketching of the Pata painting which only increase its folk i. e. authentic nature. This authenticity too, is often attached to the sense of 'traditional.' Once again as per the demands of dealers, an authentic Pata painting would be produced by village craftsmen and / or women, working in the rural and 'pre-modern' setting of an Indian village, with all what it exotifies.[69] Such craft would definitely maintain traditional practices such as the use of natural pigments and techniques that inherited from ancestors and from the guru-pupil traineeship. These are features of what these paintings have once been, therefore seen as genuine and real; but the location of these features in the past of the tradition is what brings forward the nostalgia and the longing

[66] Steiner, "Authenticity, Repetition and the Aesthetics of Seriality The work of Tourist art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 92.
[67] Phillips and Steiner. *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, 16.
[68] Steiner, "Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Tourist Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 98.
[69] Inglis, "Master, Machine, and Meaning: Printed Images in Twentieth-Century India," 149.

for these more truthful past traditions, eventually satisfied by the acquisition of such paintings. This is best illustrated by Kavita Singh's *Changing the Tune: Bengali Pata painting's encounter with the Modern,* where she opens her paper on the false statement of a signboard advertising Pata paintings using vegetable colours at the Crafts Museum in Delhi.[70] As exemplified by Singh, in reality very little of all this is true and the authenticity as well as the tradition both seem to be created for marketing purposes by the retailers on the basis of what the people who come to buy them might expect.

f. **Pata painting as Company paintings?**

Before reaching my conclusion on Pata painting, I would like to mention a few words about the relation between Pata painting and the paintings that were produced for the British and other earlier European 'Companies' in India. These paintings were produced by Indians in the eighteenth and nineteenth century for European people. Mildred Archer coined them as "Company painting."[71] The same as Pata painting satisfies tourists and their ideas about authentic Indian paintings, Company paintings satisfied the European taste in providing them with exotic depictions of Hindu deities or occupational castes along other themes. This may reveal a lot about the taste of the time and its evolution to what we see now.

In *Company Paintings*, Archer explains that at the time of European arrival in India, traditional and indigenous patronage was decreasing which made it necessary and welcoming to paint for other commissions.[72] A similar process has been taking place in India since Independence with a shift to national and private patronage as a counterpart to the local communities. Another interesting feature of Company paintings is about its development in places where the British cultural influence was felt and where the British stations were in place.[73] Similarly, the network of crafts *melas* and emporia that promote Pata paintings are flourishing in big Indian metro cities, which are major places of interactions among the domestic and foreign tourist but also with the Indian diaspora visiting home, all interested in buying this image of India. Finally, if 'authenticity'

[70] Singh, Kavita. "Changing the Tune Bengali Pata Painting's Encounter with the Modern." *India International Centre Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1996). 1.
[71] Archer, Mildred, Graham Parlett, and Victoria and Albert Museum. *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period*. London: Ahmedabad: Middletown, NJ: The Museum, 1992.
[72] Ibid., 17.
[73] Ibid., 17.

might have not been the primary reason for producing 'Company painting', it is what drives that of Pata painting. Either way, it is a representation of India for outsiders that would guide the production, first with the ethnographic and exotic, now with the folk and authentic.

At first, it struck me to see how closely related might Company painting and Pata painting possibly be, in their commoditised dimension and in reaching out to outsiders. Both share the subject matter of Hindu mythology and popular Hindu deities along with few of the occupation or caste images for Company paintings, translated into 'village' scene for Pata paintings. After reading Archer's *Company Paintings* but also Dallapiccola' *South Indian Paintings,* I realized that in fact, these paintings may be seen in dialogue with each other more than in a chronological comparison.

In terms of patronage which has been guiding most of my demonstration, the Company paintings were commissioned mostly by European administrator of the companies, along with travellers but also Indian upper-class population, all sharing space in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century British India. Similarly, it is foreigners visiting India but also upper-class Indians who acquire Pata paintings as well as other crafts and form most of the current patronage of Indian handicraft. Now the major difference is that Pata paintings are mediated by the state that is in fact the main patron but also plays the role of the middleman here. We do not know enough about the context of exchange of Company painting and apart from direct commissions such as the Manucci[74] set for instance but also other direct purchase that took place later in the nineteenth century, very little has been written on the market and possible intermediaries of these paintings and about their context of exchange. Perhaps similar *melas* or at local bazaars would act as retailers for Company paintings? Perhaps the private commissions were highly favoured? Certainly, the European taste was guiding the painters towards certain styles of depiction and colours, themes etc. but there is not much known about potential entities to channel such tastes. In any case, the presence of the state through the AIHB in the Pata painting marketing is unprecedented and guides the production to a great extent.

[74] Ibid., 14-5.

Another important point of difference between the two is that in spite of sharing similar subject, located within the curiosity and the quest for a souvenir of India, both painting styles have very different visual rendering. We could simply look at Pata painting as a response to contemporary tastes of tourist as it were for the paintings during the Companies, answering their contemporary demands. But one particular observation goes against this idea.

Finally, as we follow the regional development of Company Painting across Archer's study, the production comparatively had a lower development in the three regions that concerns our Pata painting genre. In present-day Telangana, the region was then under the Nizam's domination of the Hyderabad State, therefore less incline to British patronage of paintings. At Puri and in the surrounding, the tradition of *pattachitra* was particularly vivid due to the regular amount of pilgrims visiting. In portions of west Bengal, at Calcutta for instance, Kalighat painters interfered in the potential development of Company paintings.[75] Archer adds to the list the Punjab Hills and interestingly, Rajasthan, which also had a strong local patronage from *raja*s well in place at the time of the British. This might be a simple coincidence and other areas where paintings were produced might have not been looked at which could break this over generalizing observation but the avenue is worth considering.

Jan Stuart in the preface of *South Indian Painting* suggested that folk paintings had been less extensively and later collected than the popular Company paintings.[76] With this information in mind, the intervention of the Indian state onto handicrafts right after Independence is even more meaningful. It would serve the purpose of reviving local crafts, of giving an economic push to the newly born Indian country, of supporting the political nationalist project, but through a revival of already existing and strong visual traditions previously ignored and overshadowed by the 'colonial' Company Paintings. It is interesting to see that Pata painting may be a resurgence of the more rooted visual expressions, already existing at the time of the British but not collected as extensively as the one produced for the colony. Perhaps the process of institutionalization and its consequent homogenization of the genre might be misleading towards the wrong way of

[75] Ibid., 97.
[76] British Museum and Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, 7.

comparison with Company paintings. But this would demand further research on private commissions of both Pata and Company and I could only conduct the former.

g. **Homogeneity as authenticity**

The criteria I have just enumerated here allow me to argue for a homogenisation of the style of paintings on cloth regularly referred to as *pat, pata, and patam*. These paintings all originate in one region's folklore and are still advertised as such but all represent the same subject in a similar format and in the same style. Cheriyal paintings for this market adjust their features and partake in a process of homogenisation of the paintings and in the creation of a new genre of Pata paintings. Advertised as the most localised and the authentic folklore, they fit the buyer's expectations of authenticity. In fact, the painting only translates the discourse of retailers as per the demands of clients and simultaneously reinforced by the painters. 'Authenticity' is a powerful marketing strategy, understood by emporia and DCs in order to renew the artisans' practice and adjust it to new markets working towards their sustainability. However, this has a greater impact towards the dissemination of a shared knowledge about folk paintings in India. The small varieties that one can see among these paintings will be too little in comparison to their original heterogeneity and this is clearly contributing to an Indian homogeneous and shared culture, easier to disseminate. Yet it is important to consider regional differences and highlight them as well. For this reason, this new genre of painting is only epitomised to the extent that it will become an archetype of the original painting it is imitating. This way, a Cheriyal painting will definitely have a red background, an Orissan *Pattachitra* will have flowing figures and big borders and a Bengali *pat* will have contemporary themes. Through the acquisition of one of these paintings, it must be made easy for a customer to either connect with the state he has affinity with or to simply buy the one he prefers hence building the connection with the place it comes from.

4. **Conclusion**

Cheriyal paintings are handicrafts of India, revived and taken out of the dark ages as India became independent. If their discovery and revival took place in the nationalist

context, the process of reinforcing Indian rooted culture as a force to counter the British presence continued post-Independence in the dialectics of identity formation and development of disfavoured sectors, both working towards the construction of India. This could only take place -and it did - through a network of institutions, tangible spaces and organisation that take care of both these aspects of identity formation and development; but also through institutional initiatives that secure the work instituted by these organisations such as the GI tag. In aesthetic terms, it resulted in the institutionalisation of not only Cheriyal painting style but all they carry within these initiatives for which they have been called to participate, especially that of the award. This way, miniature and the *guru-pupil* training both were taken as 'traditional Indian' ways of doing craft and offered validity but also exclusivity to only few of the practices that actually were traditionally Indian as Indic. This is most highly illustrated in the homogenisation of the Pata painting category and the creation of a new genre of painting, somewhere between craft and art, between traditional and modern, essentially Indian and reflecting the idea of craft as a whole. In this chapter, I presented Cheriyal painting as an Indian handicraft and the processes in which it was institutionalised as such. However, my primary goal was to be exhaustive in presenting all the facets of this painting tradition. For that, I must now turn to museums and Cheriyal paintings as museum objects.

Chapter VI

Cheriyal painting in museums

As we saw in the previous chapter, the intervention of the All-India Handicraft Board (AIHB) into the lives of Cheriyal paintings permitted a new definition for these paintings. They are now considered as a local commercialised craft of Telangana - and earlier Andhra Pradesh - and solely received by the communities who initially produced them. This association to the 'craft world' did not however stop the paintings from pushing at the doors of museums and from being exhibited as 'art', be it 'fine' or 'folk'. Perhaps one of the reasons for such contingent development is due to the fact that their entry into museums took place not only after, but also before and at the same time as the AIHB initiated their revival, depending on which cultural institution or museum we refer to. The decision to present the institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting through the government and the handicraft market first is partly because this process facilitated access to the material on these paintings and their painters. Extensive research on the Cheriyal painting tradition would have been more difficult without their popularisation by the handicraft sector. However, museums participated in institutionalising Cheriyal painting inasmuch as the handicraft market did, drawing on different properties of the paintings, constructing a different discourse and driving painters towards different visual rendering of the Cheriyal idiom. By the Cheriyal idiom, I include paintings - old and on cloth - but also newer ones on paper as well as painted objects such as portable shrines and wooden figurines. In the following discussion, I will examine the various museum institutions in which Cheriyal paintings found a space. As in the previous chapter the focus is not on the object but on the correspondence between the paintings' material features and the museums' discourses.

1. Critical survey of Cheriyal painting in museum collections

The most important collection of scroll paintings that were initially produced for performance in Telangana belongs to the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian

Art in Hyderabad. Mittal collected his first scrolls in the 1960s[1] and now owns several scrolls of several narratives from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, among them several of the Markandeya Purana, several of the Madel Purana, and some of the Goud Purana, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. In fact, the museum remains at the state of a private collection and is not yet displayed in one particular building, or open to the public, in spite of having acquired the institutional status of a museum. The paintings may be viewed on request to Mittal himself who would then bring them back from a safe to show them to the interested visitor. The Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad complements Mittal's collection with two scrolls, initially used in performances as well: a Markandeya Purana (acc. no 87-9) and a Madel Purana (acc. no 73-87). Both have been dated to the nineteenth century but this has not been confirmed by anyone. While I do not know with certainty the date of acquisition of the scrolls at the Salar Jung Museum, the deputy keeper confirmed that they entered the new museum building in 1968 with the rest of the collection and that it was therefore not a later acquisition.[2] In addition to these two Indian museums, the British Museum in London has in storage two scrolls as well, both dated nineteenth century and identified as the Markandeya Purana (acc. no 0615, 0.1) and the Madel Purana (acc. no 1007, 0.1). These were collected much later, respectively in 1996 and 2003. Apart from these three major collections of scrolls, the Calico Museum of Textile in Ahmedabad, founded in 1949, displays a nineteenth century scroll of the Markandeya Purana (acc. no 2397) among a wealthy collection of textiles. Finally, the Crafts Museum in Delhi, founded in 1956, has in storage another nineteenth century scroll of the Markandeya Purana (acc. no 85/6903).

The reconfiguration of the Crafts Museum unfortunately made it difficult for me to see it and I could not gather information on the painting. The second group of museums chose to represent Cheriyal painting as the material culture of a particular region Telangana / Andhra Pradesh, in India. Here, we can include DakshinaChitra in Chennai, opened in 1996, and the Indira Gandhi Manav Rashtriya Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) in Bhopal, opened in 1979, both exhibiting scrolls as well as various painted objects from Cheriyal.

[1] Mittal. *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*. 8.
[2] November 2013. Discussion with Veerender Mallam, deputy keeper at the Salar Jung Museum.

The list is not exhaustive and there are other museum institutions that collected Cheriyal paintings as well but which I could not include because I did not visit the place or did not come across it in my data collection. The tradition being very dynamic, there surely are other paintings that were collected after I completed fieldwork too. I selected museums that I deemed important for their position as institutions or for the paintings they chose to display. I also voluntarily omitted two specialised museums: the Ram Katha Museum in Ayodhya because I will look at it more particularly in the next chapter, and the Telugu University Warangal Museum, for which I have presented the collection with the case study of the Katam Raju Katha in Chapter 4. Finally, it is important to note here that an exhaustive survey was not at all possible due to the lack of records on museums and other institutions for which the Cheriyal painters have given an object. The painters do not systematically note down where their paintings are and forget over time.

a. **Private collections**

The literature on museums is wide and scattered among several disciplines such as cultural studies, anthropology, history, art history, and among various aspects of the museum, such as collecting, the museum objects, and the public. But if all these aspects have been discussed over time and disciplines, it rarely covered museums in India. The literature on museums in India has largely been the concern of only a few and the same scholars and followed the periodization from late colonial India, the nationalist period of newly Independent India, and the most recent effects of globalisation. While Tapati Guha-Thakurta is notable for her involvement with the politics of art institutions and their objects in pre and post-Independence India,[3] Kavita Singh offers the most dynamic scholarship on museums in modern and contemporary India. She looked at the history of museum in colonial India,[4] and worked on the case study of the National Museum in Delhi.[5] She also approached the problematic concept of a 'universal museum'[6] and the

[3] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*. Columbia University Press, 2004.
[4] Singh, Kavita. "Material Fantasy: The Museum in Colonial India." In *India: Art and Visual Culture, 1857-2007*, edited by Gayatri Sinha, 40-57. Mumbai: Marg Publications and Bodhi Art Gallery, 2009.
[5] Singh, Kavita. "The Museum Is National." *India International Centre Quarterly* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 176-96.
[6] Singh, Kavita. "The Universal Museum: View from Below." in *Witnesses to history: a compendium of documents and writings on the return of cultural objects*, edited by Lyndel V. Prott, 123-129 Paris: UNESCO, 2009.

new definition of a museum in the context of "religious revivalism,"[7] which I shall return to later in this chapter.

In her essay *Material Fantasy, The Museum in Colonial India*[8], Singh points out the importance of princely states' collections in the development of museums in colonial India. Through the case study of Sayaji Rao's museum in Baroda instituted in 1887, she explains how these museums' "galleries collected not just locally made items, but international examples as well" as both emulation and challenge to the colonial museum habits. [9] These princely collections but also those of wealthy private collectors and their associated museums still make a large part of museum collections in India, and Cheriyal paintings take part in these exemplary collections.

Perhaps the most obvious case would be that of the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad. The Museum is not a princely collection but that of the Salar Jung II and III, Prime Ministers of the Nizam VI and VII of Hyderabad respectively, from 1885 to 1949. The Salar Jungs' collection is a rich combination of indigenous Indian artefacts as well as a wide range of textiles, miniatures, woodwork from the Middle East but also western paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When Mir Yusuf Ali Khan, Salar Jung III died in 1949, the collection was first arranged in the Salar Jung's palace in Diwan Deodi, where it stayed until 1968, after which it was moved to its present location in the old Hyderabad district of Charminar. It was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1951 as a museum under the private administration of the Salar Jung Estate. The Salar Jung Museum and Estate - like several princely museums in India - eventually merged with the unified Indian government in 1958, after the heirs of the Salar Jung donated the collection to India. It remained so until 1961 when the administration was shifted to an autonomous board of trustees among them a representative of the central and state governments, of Osmania University and a member of the Salar Jung family among other.[10]

[7] Mathur, Saloni, and Kavita Singh. "Reincarnations of the Museum: The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism." In *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, edited by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, New Delhi: Routledge, 2015., 203-18.
[8] Singh. "Material Fantasy: The Museum in Colonial India."
[9] Ibid., 49.
[10] "Welcome to Salarjung Museum webpage." http://www.salarjungmuseum.in/html/history.html.

Another important private collection that now is a museum is that of the Sarabhai family in Ahmedabad, now hosted in the family's *haveli* as the Calico Museum of textile. Here, the collection of objects is the credit of an important industrialist family of Gujarat, so is the foundation of the museum in 1949. Until now, the museum is privately run by the Sarabhai's foundation and hosts one of the most important collections of textile in India.

The last and perhaps more modest case of an important private collection taking part in the museum landscape of India is the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian art. To date, the museum does not have a building to host the objects, in spite of having acquired the official status of a private museum. It is difficult to evaluate the extent of Mittal's collection and museum as the objects are not displayed or catalogued but a range of publications on the museum objects, funded privately by the museum shed light the collection of miniature, manuscripts, Pahari paintings among other local artefacts.

If the Calico and the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal museums regularly publish catalogues of their collections, and the Salar Jung guidebooks and a journal, it is rather difficult to find any information or critique on each of these three museums and on specialised museums in India in general. A lot of work remains in this area. In contrast, more recent and more challenging museum institutions in India such as the Crafts Museum in Delhi, and DakshinaChitra in Chennai, - that both hold Cheriyal paintings in their collection as well - have received some scholarly attention.

b. **Edutainment**[11]

Perhaps one of the reasons for the poor and scattered information on Indian museums and the greater attention offered to these new museum-like spaces such as the Crafts Museum may come from the very definition of a museum and that of a museum object in the Indian context. In fact, the definition of the museum has not only been a question in India but about the museums that proliferated since the nineteenth century museums as well. Saloni Mathur in *Social Thought and Commentary: Museums Globalization*, reminds us that the museum "was entirely enmeshed in the 'spectacle of commodity

[11] Starn, Randolph. *A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies*. Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2005. 91.

culture' that transformed society in the nineteenth century, and arguably has more in common with its cousins - the department store, the arcade, the world's fair - than it has ever wanted to admit."[12] This is widely supported by literature on more recent museums in India as well. Appadurai and Breckenridge for instance, include the Indian museums of the last twenty years as part of the "exhibition complex" that they bracket as "museum-festival-sale."[13] This 'complex' was a response to the anxieties of the museum as it shifted from its marginal position in the nineteenth century to the more open category of 'public culture.'[14]

The first museum in India (the museum of the Asiatic Society in Bengal), founded in 1784, followed conventional encyclopaedic museology as seen in western museums such as the British Museum, and led to the Indian and British elite. Since the 1990s however, museums in India have exceeded the boundaries of this conventional western museology to take part in the broader family of entertainment that includes theme parks, cultural centres, crafts fairs, festivals, village-like reproductions and any other space that joins together the display of artefacts with that of entertainment. Singh and Mathur's most recent co-publication *Reincarnations of the Museum: The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism*[15] is particularly interesting in this regards. While looking at three large-scale religious complexes in India that all include an exhibition space, they explore the association of the 'museum' with entertainment, as a means for increasing cultural consumption - and propaganda in the case of "religious revivalism."[16] At times in relation to religious tourism, at times with an emphasis on the authentic Indian culture, museums in India may be seen as part of this broader world of "edutainment"[17] that responds to the last thirty years of change in the cultural economy. India offers plenty of examples of such changes in museum culture which call for other ways of understanding collections and objects on display, perhaps more under sensory experiences than in relation to museum education. Here, I think about the Crafts Museum in Delhi, the IGRMS in Bhopal, and DakshinaChitra in Chennai. Although each of them has their own policy and their own stance on artefacts, all are similarly

[12] Mathur, Saloni. "Social Thought & Commentary: Museums Globalization." *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2005). 700.
[13] Appadurai, Arjun, and Carol A. Breckenridge. "Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India." In *Museums and Their Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by I. Karp, S. Levine and T. Ybarra-Frausto, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. 178.
[14] Ibid., 179.
[15] Mathur and Singh. "Reincarnations of the Museum: The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism."
[16] Ibid., 203.
[17] Starn *A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies*. 91.

conceived with open-air spaces and a village setting, in addition to more conventional indoors gallery space and visitors' facilities such as a café/canteen and a souvenir shop.

c. 'Universal museum' and 'museum complex'

Kavita Singh, in *The Universal Museum: View from Below*[18] takes her observation on religious revivalism further onto cultural revivalism in which she includes all museum complexes that support any form of cultural orthodoxy and not only religious ones. She sees these new spaces of cultural appropriation as the major opponents to the traditional "museum mode."[19] In museum mode, she includes any museums that aimed at thorough collecting across regions and time periods, in other word any 'universal museum.'[20] Interestingly, she also includes national museums into the category of the 'universal museum', along with other "tiny site museum,"[21] as they all shared the same encyclopaedic intentions but on different scales. This is particularly important as Cheriyal paintings found a space in both these 'universal' museums, which we can recognise in the Calico, the Salar Jung, and the British museums, but also in those who have more specifically defined intentions such as the Crafts Museum, the IGRMS, and DakshinaChitra.

Surprisingly, this divide is also supported by the nature of the collection these museums offer to the public, i. e, art pieces on the one side and material culture on the other, and by the nature of the Cheriyal objects these museums chose to exhibit i. e. the long scroll for performances or the smaller portable paintings found on the handicraft market. The first category tends to insist on the uniqueness and the 'original' format of the painting tradition, locating its importance in the past and in its impressive visual features. The second would rather present the material culture of the locals, a metonym for the people they represent, in our present times. Apart from this rather wide difference between art and material culture, these museums also oscillate between those choosing to represent the past of the tradition or its present, its material features or its socio-cultural

[18] Singh. "The Universal Museum: View from Below." 128.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums 2002." Signed by eighteen museums across the world to declare that their particular mission as 'universal' museums makes the retention of objects acquired long ago important for the interests of all peoples. In *Witnesses to history: a compendium of documents and writings on the return of cultural objects*, edited by Lyndel V. Prott, Paris: UNESCO, 2009.
[21] Singh. "The Universal Museum: View from Below." 124.

environment. The variety of objects and the broad chronological spectrum of available paintings under the denomination Cheriyal allowed entry to most of these categories.

In spite of the shortcomings of such categories, I chose to follow Singh and look at museums institutions as either 'universal' or conventional museum modes or as 'cultural edutainment'. Assuming that the former followed the colonial museum format and the latter the cultural economics of globalisation since the 1990s, I chose to first look at universal museums followed by the large-scale open air complex in India.

2. 'Universal Museums'

At first, I have chosen to present three museums that have collected scroll paintings of the Telangana region and presented them as old art pieces: the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad and the British Museum in London. The choice of paintings they made for their collection is common to all three; they all exhibit long scrolls from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. All three are important and recognised museum institutions in their own speciality.

a. The Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad

The Salar Jung museum is considered one of the most important two-men (Salar Jung II and III) collections in India, gathering altogether around 43000 objects from across the world and across time-periods.[22] The museum displays two scrolls of the Telangana painting tradition. The small portions of the scrolls displayed in the museum indicate paintings of the Markandeya Purana, and the Madel Purana. Both have been dated to the nineteenth century. The scrolls are labelled as *Pattachitra* and share room with other cloth paintings such as kalamkaris and pichwais both from the Andhra Pradesh - and now Telangana - region. For the Markandeya Purana, the first section of the scroll is unfolded and under glass with the depiction of Ganesha and Vishnu before the actual narrative of the Padmasali starts. Right adjacent to it, the scene that is chosen for the Madel Purana is that of Madivellaiah fighting the elephant, the hero founder of the

[22] Kumar, Ramesh. "The Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, a question of location." In *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, edited by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh. 244.

Chakkali caste for which the narrative is performed. The scrolls' identification is rather vague and labels the painting as 'Legend of Hindu Gods'. However, a small paragraph next to them indicates further information about the function of these scrolls and the caste narratives.

The Salar Jung museum is one of the most visited museums in India and recognized internationally for its variety of objects. The collection is composed of rare manuscripts, miniatures paintings, textiles and costumes, but also of lesser-known miniature traditions from Rajasthan or the hills and folk art forms such as kalamkaris, pichwais, and Paithan paintings, among many other objects. The presence of these scrolls among the great variety of arts and artefacts that the museum hosts guarantees the Cheriyal scrolls a great visibility. Because the museum is one of the most important public places of the city of Hyderabad, it is very well known to local craftsmen and artists working in Telangana as well.[23] Conversation with Cheriyal painters, with the Hyderabad based contemporary artist Laxman Aelay and other craftsmen of the Nirmal painting tradition, all agreed to say that they had once some interaction with the museum. For instance, Cheriyal painting was presented during a workshop held by Madhu Merugoju in 2010. There, he explained the history, the technique end helped participants creating their own Cheriyal painting. The small painting then used for demonstration are on sale regularly at the museum shop among other local artefact that one can find at the Lepakshi emporia as well. The museum therefore holds an important position among the international, national, and local museum institution scene.

b. **The Calico Museum in Ahmedabad**

The Calico museum is located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Ahmedabad is an important centre of design and textiles in India and the Calico museum specialises in textiles. It hosts a large collection of textiles but also looms and printing blocks, and any other artefacts used for dyeing, weaving etc. Apart from this focus on textiles, it also displays a variety of Indian paintings and sculptures. All of these are displayed in a traditional western Indian *haveli* that belonged to the founder of the museum. The preservation of the museum pieces is considered with great care and the visitors are not allowed to move freely among the collection. Visits should be booked ahead over the phone and

[23] Ibid.

only authorised for groups of twenty people. The collection is divided into two sections and the visitors can only visit one section at a time. Scholars may book a private appointment to look at a piece further.

The museum displays one scroll of the Telangana region, a Markandeya Purana from the nineteenth century. There, the scroll is the only one to be exhibited in full. Hanging from the ceiling, it is unfolded across the three storeys of the building in the staircase compound, therefore offering both a frontal and back view, and in totality. The scroll is protected with a glass frame that covers the entire surface from both sides. This is particularly impressive, especially for a piece that is around 10 meters (985 cm), and brings one to wonder about the means of production and the uses of such a painting. In contrast, the location of the painting in the staircase compound does not allow any close view of particular motifs or smaller elements of the narrative such as the great variety of textile pattern I have talked about in Chapter 3. As I already explained in the same chapter, during a performance, only the sections that follow the storyteller's narration are usually unfolded at a time. In its original context of performance display, the scroll would likewise be seen from afar and the audience would not reach out to those motifs either but its position in a museum implied particular rituals of seeing that may not be fulfilled here. The back of the scroll, are usually kept blank or inscribed with data about the scroll exchange of ownership that serves the performers' methods of archiving. Surprisingly on the Calico scroll, the back of the scroll is entirely sketched out with rough astrological charts for which I could neither have a close look, nor gather information from the museum staff.

Photography was not allowed either and no one may take a souvenir image of the beautiful sacred pieces seen in the *haveli*. No label explains the function of the scroll and its original use, neither is it supplemented by the guiding tour. Instead, the visitor is kept in awe by the sacralisation of the object, for which the lack of information only enhances its mystery. The removal of the objects from its original context, the absence of information, as well as the magnificent full display, all participate in the 'museumisation' of Cheriyal painting, and in rendering the painting sacred and marvellous. The price for this is the removal of the performative dimension, of the context of production, presentation and reception. The guided tour too, contributes to the sacralisation of the object. The group needs to remain together at all times, following the guide who enters rooms one after the other, preceded and followed by two

attendants who will alternatively turn on and off the lights as we enter each room. Following the group, a guard makes sure no one was left behind and starts wandering around the collection, now darkened.[24] A strict focus on the religious dimension of the objects, almost philosophical at times, highly increases the dramatization of the visit and of the objects. Most of this section of the tour focuses on the large collection of pichwais that the museum guide insists on because of their divine presence. The Telangana scroll becomes part of this dramatic guiding performance that chose to present these textiles from all over India for what they have in common which is the divine presence they host in the figures they depict. In spite of the lack of contextual information and the rather homogenous discourse for textiles that have largely different provenance, one is forced to see the attempt of the Calico guiding performance and display at maintaining one fundamental aspect of these objects which is indeed their divine presence, and for which the museumisation of object serves best the purpose.

c. **The British Museum in London**

The last of the three museums I decided to include in this section is the British Museum in London. The museum is a national museum of the United Kingdom, founded in 1753 after the England had acquired the objects from Sir Hans Sloane's collection. The history of the British Museum is complex and set into the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the nineteenth century colonisation. For the purpose of this chapter, I will not run through the history as it is found in much more thorough writings.[25] Instead, I would like to focus on one particular aspect which I introduced earlier and that caused much debate among the museum world which is the claim for 'universality'. As reported by Tom Flynn, the British Museum became in the early 2000s, one of the most "vocal proponent" of the "importance of universal museums." [26] The circumstances of such a position took place after a forum of forty of the world's major museums and galleries gathered in Munich in 2002, to discuss the growing request for repatriation of objects. In a more recent happening, the foundation of the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened to question the possible creation of such universality in our present days,

[24] Described from my personal visit to the museum on the 01/06/2014
[25] See, for example, Wilson David, M., *The British Museum: A Noble History*, British Museum Press, 2002; Miller, Edward. *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum*, 1974; Flynn, Tom. *The Universal Museum, A Valid Model for the 21st Century*, 2012.
[26] Flynn, Tom. *The Universal Museum: A Valid Model for the 21st Century?* Published by Tom Flynn: 2012.

as in opposition to the collections of museums such as the British Museum or the Louvre, built from a variety of power relations now considered highly unethical and that consequently justified such claims for repatriation. Going back to Cheriyal painting, they entered the British Museum collection respectively in 1996 and 2003. The scrolls are not on display but a 2000 publication form the museum, written by Dallapiccola, the specialist on South Indian paintings does offer valuable information on the scrolls, on the identification of the narratives and on their context of performance.[27]

In taking part of the British Museum's collections, the Cheriyal scroll also contributes to the construction of this ambitious and highly criticised encyclopaedic knowledge about the world. The pieces that were chosen to partake in such a universal project were old scrolls, one vertical and one horizontal, of two different narratives, initially used for performances and later acquired for the collection. In the online catalogue, they may be found as paintings and from Andhra Pradesh. These details are important as they justify the choice of such paintings rather than others such as the smaller portable ones for instance, as to convey such universality, which is what I would like to discuss now.

The canvases on which the Cheriyal scrolls are painted are cotton cloth woven in the region and then coated several times before being painted with a highly figurative narrative. The Calico collected the Markandeya Purana as a textile, the Salar Jung as a local painting on cloth (*pattachitra*), and the British Museum as a painting. The materiality of these paintings is ambivalent and questions their categorisation as either painting or textile. This is not the case only for Cheriyal and a particular relevant tradition of painting on cloth that may be considered as both textile and painting is kalamkari as well. The set of rules and differences made between textile and painting is not the scope of this thesis but this raises serious questions about the validity of certain museum categories. Nevertheless, the paintings chosen for these three museums have other features in common. The foremost criterion seems to be in the collection of old pieces, as old as it can be. The historical interest of these paintings clearly is a synonym of its capacity to age and be found nevertheless. One of the result of such focus on the old object and which I shall introduce in conclusion of the thesis is an increase in the painting's fixity of the painting style as well as a trend in copying old paintings, misunderstood from the museumisation of the paintings by the painters as the criteria to

[27] Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*.

attract the generous institutional customers, when the actual value for museum representatives lies in the time the scroll has survived.

Apart from this, the practice of collecting old pieces does provide valuable archival contributions but it also keeps aside the dynamism of the painting tradition that may automatically be understood as dead by being in the museums. These three museums all share some distance with the object. In exchange for its imposing materiality and its historical appeal, the context of commission, the subject matter and the contemporaneity of these paintings is not - or too little - part of the discourse. This distance is to be understood in terms of the connection between the visitors' interests and the objects exhibited. Even the Salar Jung museum that is located in Telangana, few hundred kilometres from the place where these paintings are produced, does not provide detailed information on the function of the paintings. The interest that these museums show in the scrolls does not directly relate to the entire nature of the objects and rather focuses on certain aspects, sometimes minor, but mostly in relation to the broader collection of the museum overall; and that is what the visitors retain.

The sacralisation of ancient objects also tends to work towards a diminution of the contemporaneity of these paintings, hence threatening its existence and continuity. For instance, we know for a fact that the Markandeya Purana was the most extensively collected narrative on scroll followed by the Madel Purana, partly because these narratives are almost no longer performed but most probably because once a museum or a private collector acquired one of them, the other members of the community could then understand the potential financial value of such pieces, leading them to sell more extensively scrolls. Craftsmen understand well the value of such pieces and increase the market of the scroll painting they still owe, so do the performers and the patrons. In fact the painters took great pride in mentioning to me several times about museum representatives and collectors visiting in search of 'antique' pieces.[28] The religious object that was first presented as a source of livelihood for three communities has shifted to a source of extra money, swapping its religiosity and superstitious power for the financial ease it may bring to members of the tradition. If we continue further, such financial reward for a scroll may push the community to sell their scroll and take up other activity rather than continue performing, hence closing the circle to the

[28] 'Antique pieces' is the terms systematically used by the Cheriyal painters as they refer to the old scrolls that were used for performances.

disappearance of that particular narrative performance. All this is of course highly speculative but worth considering as potential future for such rooted traditions.

Each of the museum institutions I have just presented holds key positions in museum culture without having any of them directly focusing on any of the functional and iconographical characteristics of the Telangana scrolls such as the performative dimension or their folk narratives. Each of these scrolls partakes in the museum collection and add meaning to that particular collection removing that of the object, therefore serving a rather 'universal' discourse on objects. In fact, we could go as far as admitting that the object has been subscribed of certain of its qualities, such as its relation to performance, in order to serve this universality. Such focus on the object materiality, however should be nuanced. The attempt at aesthetic appreciation and possible objectivity on the object where the lack of contextual information provides the objects with self-stand art historical and material value, which is usually disregarded by folklorists, anthropologists and the ethnographic discipline.

3. **The Indian 'craft museums'**

Ethnographic collections usually opt for an emphasis on the objects' meaning and resonance. For the case of the Cheriyal painting tradition, they offer a complementary view to that of the above-mentioned museums. They especially attempt at presenting their contemporaneity and at re-establishing the context they had lost inside the 'universal' museums. The museums in which this takes place are particularly difficult to define because of their various spaces and functions. Closer to ethnographic collections, these museums often imitate the Indian village and consider the artefacts as the material culture and the crafts of the people these villages represent. I include here the Crafts Museum in Delhi and its counterpart near Chennai DakshinaChitra, as well as the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya in Bhopal (IGRMS). In spite of being close to ethnographic collecting and *in-situ* display, it is important to maintain a divide with conventional ethnographic museums. These museums amalgamate part of ethnographic display with features of a cultural centre, a craft market and a thematic park. This is what associates them to what I presented earlier as museum entertainment. Because

each of these complexes repeats and emulates the national Crafts Museum in New Delhi, I chose to call them crafts museums.

In term of Cheriyal objects, we are dealing here with paintings as one finds in handicrafts outlets and as institutionalised by the government. The Cheriyal paintings are no longer long antique scroll pieces, exhibited behind glasses and magnified for the museum public. The IGRMS commissioned a contemporary scroll narrative specifically for the museum collection instead of collecting one that was previously in circulation. Similarly, DakshinaChitra offered an overview of all what Cheriyal paintings currently are in commissioning recent productions of scrolls, smaller and similar paintings to those available at the Lepakshi Emporium, wooden figurines and a temple *murti*. The Crafts museum comes as an exception here. It collected a nineteenth century scroll of the Markandeya Purana similar to the Calico's for its mixed museum space that combines conventional museology with open-air village reproductions.

a. **The Crafts museum in New Delhi**

Because of the choice of an object usually favoured by conventional museums but in a museum space closer to that of ethnographic setting, the Crafts Museum may be seen as mediating role between the 'universal' museums and the 'craft' ones. As an introduction to this institution, I would like to cite a passage from Jyotindra Jain's *A Heritage Comes Alive* written in 1990 while he was the director at the Crafts Museum.

> It is imperative that we reconsider the concept of a museum as inherited by us, especially in the view of the fact that Indians themselves never made Museums of fragmented art objects or anything for that matter… We build stone or brick and concrete rectangle boxes for Museum buildings…display chopped Buddha heads, decontextualized *yakshis* and architectural fragments inside glass cases with captions that tell nothing. [29]

This statement is important because the Crafts Museum does aim at re-contextualising the artefacts in placing them in village-like spaces, without glass and next to other artefacts they may share meaning with. This could then correct two of the subtractions

[29] Jain, Jyotindra. "A Heritage Comes Alive." *Indian Express Weekend*, September 22, 1990, cited in Greenough, Paul. "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi." 1995. 234.

that universal museums had forced onto Cheriyal painting which is the conventional museum space with its glasses and magnifying presentation, and the decontextualisation that follows this particular way of seeing. Unfortunately, the nineteenth century scroll of the Markandeya Purana is not on display at the museum and I can only speculate on how it may be exhibited.

The Crafts Museum was established in the 1950s under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Textiles. It is one of the first national institutions set up for the promotion of handicrafts in the newly independent India. It was built to host in residence craftsmen that work together towards the preservation of their traditional arts. While working on-site, craftsmen showcase their skills and productions to the visitors and the visitors can appreciate the traditional working conditions and the techniques as they progress. The museum was divided into several sections: a village complex, a craft demonstration area, and more conventional gallery that display various artefacts from all over India.

There is a lot to say about the Crafts Museum as a museum space. Perhaps what may be important in relation to Cheriyal painting, however, is the idea the museum strives for as a museum institution and the ways in which it responds to them. As the name indicates, the museum is dedicated to craft. As we already said in the previous chapter, craft is difficult to define but we could possibly agree to its utilitarian dimension, and the hand-manufacturing - to a certain extent. There is a wide range of objects that fits the category at the Crafts Museum such as dolls, toys, puppets, folk and tribal paintings, terra-cottas, metal inlays, ivory, etc. The Museum was first named as the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museums as it hosts an important collection of textiles as well. The museum's vocation is to improve the artisans' financial situation and mutually increase the demand for handcrafted goods. In doing so, the museum tackles both sides of the chain, proposing a direct encounter between the artisan who come in residency and the visitors who can then turn into buyers and acquire the objects made in front of them or not.

Probably one of the most complete articles with regards to this institution is by Paul Greenhough where he describes the museum space and collections at the same time as offering a critique to the function of such institution with regards to the handicrafts of

India.[30] As he reported in the article, the main purpose of the museum was to train artisan at continuity that was believed to assure survival and betterment for them.[31] This idea sustained by collecting regularly objects from live artisans that attest of great quality and of great continuity with what the tradition had been in the past. This explained why the museum chose to represent Cheriyal painting as a nineteenth century scroll, instead of a sixteen centimetres square painting on paper or a key chain. At the same time, this continuity is countered by the dynamic nature of the artisans' interactions in the demonstration area, which Greenhough illustrates pertinently in recollecting an instance where a potter was spotted trying to work with iron wires after seeing his smith colleague working with that medium.[32] The Crafts Museum therefore posits itself in a space of contestation as to whether innovation or continuity is the key to sustainability. The complexity of the Crafts Museum museology, partly based on exhibited object, partly based on live demonstration gives a space for this contestation. The ideology however seems far too rigid for the craftsmen who interact and exchange *savoir-faire* and later implement to satisfy the handicraft market's opposite stand for innovation.

The other important aspect of the Crafts Museum is the arrangement of the space. Unlike any other museums in India before its foundation, the Crafts Museum combines a variety of museological devices within the same compound. The village complex is meant to represent different Indian rural setting and to accommodate artefacts representative of these environments. This borrows from the ethnographic displays as seen in Museums of Man across the world. Along the village complex, the Crafts Museum offers a crafts demonstration area which itself functions like craft *mela* where artisans from various regions of India are set together in a market-like space and sell their artwork. It is not rare in these markets to see artisans working at the same time, as at the Crafts Museum. Finally, the museum offers more conventional gallery display where the artefact are classified, hanged on the walls and labelled as any other museum. This combination of elements makes the museum very appealing and particularly interesting to a variety of visitors, whether interested in viewing *in-situ* reproduction, coming to a market, or walking around museum galleries. The visitor is able to combine

[30] Greenough, Paul. "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi." In *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, edited by Carol A. Brenckenridge, 216-48. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 235-238.

these activities at once and bring back a wholesome experience. This museum experience is achieved through the conversion of the conventional museum into a museum complex. In this regards, the Crafts Museum opened the way to several other of these complexes in different parts of the country such as the IGRMS in Bhopal and especially DakshinaChitra in Chennai.

Greenhough conducted research for his article between 1989 and 1991. While I conducted my own research, I visited the Craft Museum twice, once in 2012 and another in 2014. My first visit was during summer and to my great disappointment, the village complex was entirely closed, and the crafts demonstration area empty. My second visit was in spring but the village space was still not opened and there were four artisans working in the crafts demonstration area that according to Greenhough could contain up to thirty artisans.[33] By the time I left India, my request for the images had not been answered and rumours of the museum closing down to be reborn into a handicraft academy had started spreading. My impression was that the ambitious project of the Crafts Museum that functioned at the time of Greenhough's fieldwork turned into something different by the time I visited.

As a short conclusion here, I would like to recall elements of a discussion about the Crafts Museum with Vaikuntam Nakash, the eldest Master painter of Cheriyal. I asked what kind of work did he have to do with the Crafts Musuem and his puzzled face could not recollect the year in which he visited. What he remembered instead is his not-so-great experience, mostly related to the poor financial incomes he was to get that was not worth travelling to Delhi. This was added to by his question of why he would need to go to Delhi when customers come to him. This clearly illustrated the evolution of a craftsman position and his possibility to choose his work depending on the financial prospects. Once again here, the ambitions of the Crafts Museum seem to have not found echo in the craftsmen' understanding.

b. **The Indira Gandhi Manav Rashtriya Sangrahalaya in Bhopal**

The second museum I would like to talk about here is the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya Museum of Humankind (IGRMS) in Bhopal. As reported by

[33] Ibid., 228.

Kishor K. Basa, the objectives of the museum were to fill up a gap in Indian museology by "putting objects in their living human context" "portraying the general flow of life of the common people" and "developing integrated vision of human life rather than segmented pictures, determined by artificial boundaries of different disciplines."[34] These objectives reveal the same intention as the Crafts Museum to replace the object in their context. Yet, more than the Crafts Museum, the Museum of Man intended to do so through the idea of presenting Indian civilisationary evolution without the boundaries usually seen in western museology i. e. anthropology, biology, history etc. The museum proposes to do so with a complementary display of indoor and outdoor exhibition spaces, a tribal and folk habitat (Fig. 6 1) representing the different climatic zones of India as well as the cultural activities of the communities inhabiting these zones such as ritual, cooking and craft.

Cheriyal painting is represented by two paintings within the indoors gallery spaces. The exhibits in gallery no. 5 is a small painting of the Ramayana, of around fifty by forty centimetres and very much alike those found in crafts emporia. The gallery no. 10 however, named "Visual storage," displays museum artefacts collected for research and informed visitors without being classified *per se* (Fig. 6. 2 and 6. 3). Inside, there is a scroll of the Markandeya Purana, painted exclusively for the museum collection by Vaikuntam Nakash in 1996. The scroll is hanging along a column (Fig. 6 4) and measures ninety by nine hundred and twenty centimetres but only the first few registers with Ganesha and Vishnu are unfolded like at to the Salar Jung museum. One important element to note here is the fact that the scroll at the IGRMS was commissioned and displayed without ever been put in circulation among the performers. In doing so, the IGRMS made an attempt to present the current situation of the performing tradition, presenting at the same time the materiality of the scroll and with it an element of the folk practice from Telangana. The museum could have taken this further in including the scroll as part of the village complex but evidently, a museum of mankind focusing on the many different cultural settings of the country could not possibly be exhaustive. This is important as the scroll display in the gallery no. 10 should not be seen as a failure of the museum project but as a step forwards that project. The museum also proposes numerous activities such as field trips with the idea of "taking the museum to

[34] Basa Kishor and G. Jayaprakasan. "Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (National Museum of Mankind) A Museum with a difference." In *Multiple Heritage: Role of Specialized Museums*, edited by Kishor K Basa. 276-292 Bhopal: New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, 2010.

the communities" and at the same time, setting up workshops "to bring the communities to the museum."[35] The Cheriyal scroll had been painted and bought after Vaikuntam delivered such a workshop at the museum.

The museum is filled with samples of paintings from the Gond and Warli tribal communities, from Madhubani in Bihar, from the story of Pithoro etc. Scholars, museum institutions and the art market have brought these paintings to light long before Cheriyal painting were known. In fact, these painting have come to be the best-known among the marginalised art forms, especially since the art market started increasing the value of these painting for their unspoilt and genius-like creative spirit, especially with Gond art. Similarly, scholarship has developed interest in these paintings and it is now fairly common to find information on each of these. What questions are raised here are that until recently, Cheriyal paintings were not part of such framework of marginalised art forms. Their first entry to a collection of contemporary 'folk arts' was here at Bhopal in 1996, and their first real space in scholarship came with Jain's *Picture Showmen* in 1998, and they remain relatively unknown in comparison with the others mentioned above.

The state of Madhya Pradesh in which Bhopal is situated concentrates a large amount of tribal population in India. Bhopal is an important centre for tribal and folk art forms in the country. It gathers together several important national and state museums and museum complexes interested in marginalised art forms. In the last twenty years, Bhopal has received significant funding for cultural institutions and promotion of the local culture and Indian ethnography as a whole. Besides, the city is easily accessible from Delhi by a six hours' train journey running daily, and close to Western India as well with its large number of tourists. Because of this key location, Bhopal has become an important touristic and cultural destination to discover the wealth of Indian tribal and folklore as well as the performing arts. In fact, some of the museums that one finds in Bhopal surpass those present in the capital. For instance, the tribal museum a vibrant space for tribal artists to produce their work on the gallery walls, which changes regularly. Similarly, the Bharat Bhavan is recognised across the country for giving an opportunity to lesser-known visual artists and performers to enter a museum institutional space. In entering this environment, Cheriyal painting enter a vibrant

[35] Ibid., 288-290.

promotional space for these art forms and the marginalised communities that produce until they might eventually become better-known.

c. **DakshinaChitra in Chennai**

The last institution I would like to consider in my demonstration is DakshinaChitra in Chennai, opened in 1997. DakshinaChitra as its name indicates *Dakshin* (South) and *Chitra* (arts) is a cultural centre that reconstituted South Indian rural environment into a thematic park that also contains auditoriums, a handicraft store and a canteen. At first, it may be seen as similar to the Crafts Museum in Delhi with a focus on South India. Both share the open-air village-like space, the interest in craftsmen demonstrating their practice on site in front of the visitors, a library, a store (Fig. 6 5) where one may find the artefacts, and a café for refreshment. Unlike the Crafts Museum however, DakshinaChitra does not have gallery spaces and displays artefacts inside or outside the houses of the village complex. As with the craft museum, there is a lot to say about DakshinaChitra but I would like to focus on what may be of importance for the position of Cheriyal painting within the institution's discourse.

DakshinaChitra is a privately run institution that was created with the support of the Madras Craft foundation and some NGOs in order to revive the heritage of South India. In this role, the centre shares with the Crafts Museum a focus and an interest in the craftsmen and in their financial improvement. Yet, DakshinaChitra responds to this in a rather different way. Firstly, it presents itself as a highly commercial space unlike the Crafts Museum, with crafts fairs taking place regularly. This is reflected in the 'experience' based museology as well, where the audience visits rural setting without having to actually go to an Indian village.[36] The world of edutainment takes its best shape at DakshinaChitra. Secondly, the Crafts Museum and DakshinaChitra chose different paths towards their altruistic projects which are seen through the choice of Cheriyal painting they have collected.

The Crafts museum assumes that continuity and fixity in a particular tradition as the only way forward to sustainability. DakshinaChitra instead, believes that innovation and

[36] Hancock Mary. "Remembering the Rural in Suburban Chennai: The Artisanal Pasts of DakshinaChitra." In *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, edited by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, 184-202 New Delhi: Routledge, 2015. 197.

adaptation are the means to sustainability.[37] DakshinaChitra's option would provide ampler possibilities of marketing and satisfy the demands of customers that stand at the root of the craftsmen sustainability. Going back to Cheriyal paintings, the continuity reflects in the nineteenth century scroll at the Crafts Museum, as a representative of what the practice was and should continue to be. In opposition, DakshinaChitra offers a more contemporaneous version of the painting practice, within the walls of one of the two houses named under the state of Andhra Pradesh **(**Fig. 6 6). The items on display are a set of dolls of the Katam Raju Katha, a temple *murti*, a few independent wooden figurines, a few small-size village scenes painted on cloth and a scroll painting of the Ramayana, painted from the scroll for performances but much smaller (Fig. 6 7). Several other Cheriyal paintings have been commissioned from Vaikuntam and kept in storage. The Ramayana scroll reflects the quality of the scroll making in a more contemporary format and iconography. These smaller scroll paintings of the Ramayana are one of the highlight of contemporary Cheriyal paintings and while I visited Cheriyal in 2012, the painters had plenty of these to sell. These are very popular and when I returned after a bit more than a year, they sold the last ones in front of me. The set of wooden figurines is that of the Katam Raju Katha that I introduced in Chapter 4. It attests of the continuing performance practice with the help of these figurines, rarely represented as the Cheriyal performance, that usually favours the more impressive and convenient scroll format. In fact, DakshinaChitra is the only museum where one can find an entire set of figurines on display. Finally, the temple *murti* and other smaller paintings both speak for the paintings regularly produced for the handicrafts market and for the local communities.

Here, the museums represent the Cheriyal tradition as it was and as it is, from the space of the local communities to that of the global craft market. The painters do not matter much however and their names are not mentioned anywhere, neither on the labels, nor as a signature on the paintings. In fact, I tried asking the painters several times who painted which object for DakshinaChitra and none was able to remember with exactitude. It seems that Nageshwar and his son Sai Kiran painted all the objects while conducting a workshop at the centre, but did not paint the scroll. Vaikuntam would have submitted the scroll and the paintings that are in the storeroom but cannot recollect painting the scroll.

[37] Ibid., 193.

Another interesting element of DakshinaChitra's ideology is its focus on South India. As anticipated, the centre would present the cultural capital of the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka. At the time of my visit in early March 2014, Telangana was not yet an independent state and Cheriyal objects were then found in a room of the section on Andhra Pradesh. The survey of these states takes place through reproduction of village houses for each of the state with inside, crafts or objects that one may find in these states. Occasionally, the museum, offers activities to entertain the visitors such as pottery, puppet making, and folk dances among others, also from each of the Southern states. In the Andhra Pradesh house, only Cheriyal art and Ikat weaving are displayed. Ikat weaving is exhibited through the display of a loom accompanied by few explanations.

DakshinaChitra is located in Tamil Nadu, which is the most regionalist of the South Indian states and has been a prominent voice for South Indian identity in the scale of the nation.[38] It is also located in Chennai, that may be seen as the cultural capital of South India in comparison with other important cities like Hyderabad or Bangalore that are grounded into the IT sector. Chennai is also the place where several national institutions such as the Lalit Kala Akademy for instance have relay in the South. DakshinaChitra therefore set itself as a cultural reviver for South India and Cheriyal paintings take part in this regionalist discourse. But it also uses the museum complex and the variety of activities beyond that of a museum to appeal to its audience. In fact, the regionalist cultural politics are not so much at play here and Mary Hancock for instance, prefers to see in DakshinaChitra a space that "claims a place for the south *within* the territorial bounds and official cultural narrative of the nation-state."[39] By cultural narrative of the nation–state she refers to the pre-independence Gandhian mission to unite the Indian nation through its diversity i. e. best reflected in the crafts. The foundation of a space that recreates similar perspective within the south would only repeat the discourse that serves unifying India rather than proposing an option for envisioning regionalism and potentially correct the omission of South Indian (dravidianism) within the project of a unified national identity.[40] Ironically too, it is regional hegemony which is at play

[38] Ibid., 190.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

within South India at DakshinaChitra. Eleven buildings represent Tamil Nadu whereas only four represent Kerala and at the time of my visit, only two for Andhra Pradesh.

DakshinaChitra proposed the first attempt at an exhaustive presentation of the contemporary practice of Cheriyal paintings. The objects presented take into consideration all the aspects of the Cheriyal style paintings, i. e. scrolls, figurines, small and big paintings, secular and religious themes etc, showing both innovation and breaks from the old tradition. In fact, the absence of an old scroll on display emphasise the focus on contemporaneity. In spite of not resolving the museological challenge of exhibiting or documenting performance, the centre does propose to acknowledge this aspect in an unusual way through the display wooden figurines. Once again here, the absence of a scroll makes a statement for the other aspects of Cheriyal painting tradition, usually omitted by museums. As a conclusion, Cheriyal paintings at DakshinaChitra may participate in a commercial experience and possibly in supporting regionalist politics; but they gained significant credibility and visibility with this institution that neither the IGRMS nor the Crafts Museum Delhi could possibly bring forward.

4. One museum for one answer

A great deal of critique of the museum comes from the alterations of meaning the objects undergo as they enter museum spaces. The museums I presented had been divided into two sections. On the one side, the universal museum provided the paintings with international visibility, and recognition equal to that of masterpiece of Renaissance paintings. This new classification offered not only recognition but increased the artistic –and financial- value of the objects too. This was possible through a removal of the paintings' original context of performance and with an emphasis on its materiality. The museum complexes on the other side, offered an attempt at re-contextualising; but not as much through its collection display as through their live interactions with the craftsmen at times of workshops or occasional fairs. This is made possible through interactive spaces where artist and visitors can interact freely and that is best answered by the open-air museums such as the Crafts Museum, the IGRMS and DakshinaChitra.

In taking part of these various museum institutions, Cheriyal painting also entered different cultural settings. The British Museum offered an international status to the paintings while the Salar Jung, the Calico, the Crafts Museum and the IGRMS all included the tradition as part of the national cultural identity. Finally, DakshinaChitra permitted a more regional consideration. This was possible through the variety of properties attributed to the painting and the grand possibility of movement that it allows. In following the categorisation of the universal museums and the crafts museums, we could apprehend Cheriyal painting as art and material culture, as painting, textiles and wood painting, and form both past and contemporary cultural developments. Cheriyal paintings are also part of the Indian artistic and craft heritage of on the scale of the nation and in generalising India as a land full of various arts and crafts. On the basis of the objects exhibited and from observing each of these institutions, DakshinaChitra seems to offer the most exhaustive and objective presentation of what contemporary Cheriyal painting is. It is also the most recently built and the most closely located to Cheriyal after the Salar Jung Museum.

At the same time, if the museums may shape the definition of Cheriyal paintings, the presence of these paintings within their collections also speaks about these institutions. For instance, the inclusion of these scrolls in DakshinaChitra emphasise Telangana's membership of the South Indian region, regardless of the possible cultural connections with other areas of the country. A distant presence within national institutions, as part of workshops at the Crafts Museum or within collections at the Calico and at the Salar Jung highlights the national awareness and governments interests for folk art forms as well.

If all these institutions have something different to convey about Cheriyal painting and their collections, the major element that gathers them together is the lack of consideration for the performative dimension of the paintings. I visited and enquired about the possibility of records of these performances at the Indira Gandhi National Centre of the Arts, a national institution located in Delhi and specialised in the intangible heritage of the country. The centre holds records and archives of numerous performance traditions across the country but no information about the performances of castes Purana in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. What I found instead were few wooden figurines of the Mahabharata, produced on the occasion of a thematic exhibition on the Epic. This silence on the performance tradition on the national scale

speaks for a general emphasis on the tangible aspects of an intangible practice and for the importance given to objects and material culture, in both art and ethnographic museums. It also speaks for the favour given to certain regions, clearly not Telangana.

It is in Warangal however, in a very small and badly maintained museum, within the department of Folk and Tribal Lore of the Telugu university campus that I found the most valuable information about the paintings in their original context. The university is specialised in research degrees about the folk and tribal lore of Telangana and spends most of their available time and funding towards the record, the documentation and the archiving of performance and related objects within the region. The faculties and museum keeper gave me full access to all the recordings and was very happy to share his vast knowledge about the performance traditions of Telangana. The research produced there is in vernacular Telugu, so are the recordings and unfortunately, the time frame of this research project did not give much space for translating these documents. It is important however to note the effort of smaller research institutions in documenting traditions kept aside by national or international ones, and that anyone interested in the subject knows that information may be found there.

The museum institutions presented here give us a sense of what all there could be said about Cheriyal paintings, and possibly too what there could not. As much as one knows about a museum or an object, one may extend the discussion on the meanings that both exchange. Together however, these museums function as a part of the whole. While talking about the 'universal' museums, Flynn recalls the impossibility of achieving universality as the collection of an object to fill up a gap only creates two more gaps on each side of that object to be filled as well.[41] This could be extended to one particular type of object such as a Cheriyal painting for which the inclusion of one type only questions the absence of another. For instance, the scrolls at the Salar Jung museums, presented as narrative tools in Telangana highlights the discard of the wooden figurine, also tools to the same narratives. This may be taken even further to particular type of painting. The same scrolls at the Salar Jung have been unfolded to display only a small portion of the whole, highlighting here the reasons for hiding the others. It is evident that no museum institution can pretend to fill these gaps as they get created systematically. As Rama Lakshmi suggests instead, "museum can offer only one view

[41] Flynn, Tom. *The Universal Museum: A Valid Model for the 21st Century?* Published by Tom Flynn: 2012. 16.

of things if it were clear that it is only one […] A museum does not have to offer the final word [but] a debate or an argument."[42]

5. Conclusion

Appadurai and Breckenridge in *Museum are good to think: heritage on view in India* look at Indian museums as part of what they call "cultural literacy."[43] They propose to not differentiate the festivals and fairs of Indian handicrafts from the more conventional museums as both belong to the family of spectacle and entertainment and contribute to this "cultural literacy."[44] While on fieldwork but also afterwards while thinking of arguments for the thesis, it was almost natural to look at Cheriyal painting's worlds separately and identify the politics of each of these worlds and formulate my conclusion on the adaptability of the Cheriyal objects. Indeed, Cheriyal objects are incredibly adaptable to their patrons and their versatility owed them spaces in museums, increased the recognition of craftsmen as artists and ameliorated their financial status. However, if I were to look at Cheriyal paintings from their reception and under Appadurai and Breckenridge's idea of public culture, I would only be looking at the paintings in the context of particular ways of viewing in India and as part of the construction of the country's modern identity. This identity is shaped by public culture, which itself is experienced through media, leisure, cinema, handicrafts fairs, and museums. In viewing both the handicraft retail platforms and museums as part of a generalised preoccupation with heritage and with richly visual approach to spectacle, Appadurai and Breckenridge dismantle the boundaries I created between Cheriyal paintings for the handicrafts market and those exhibited in museums. Both would now take part of the cultural literacy of a modern Indian that will alternatively visit the Salar Jung museum and the Shilparamam (the equivalent of the permanent crafts fair Dilli Haat in Hyderabad), possibly without even establishing a connection between these same Cheriyal objects that I spent years gathering together. What attached me to maintain my presentation nevertheless is that even in the case of a collective reception and consumption of Cheriyal painting as public culture, there had to be an introduction of these into the public sphere. In that, the handicrafts market and museums share the goal to exhibit

[42] Lakshmi, Rama. "Musings on Museums." *India International Centre Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2010). 114.
[43] Appadurai and Breckenridge. "Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India," 180.
[44] Ibid.

heritage but in rather different ways; and interestingly, the object are submitted to these different approaches to the same idea. In a study of objects, it was important to demonstrate that their institutionalisation might be divided so that the later chapters could illustrate the response of these objects to these different processes.

The institutionalisation of Cheriyal painting took place in different spheres that could be divided between the handicraft sector and the museum environment. For an object to be qualified as craft it has to fulfil several criteria, overshadowed by its opposition to other objects that are either produced by machine or produced primarily for aesthetic rather than utilitarian purpose and that we may refer to as 'art." The increase of machine-made goods as a feature of the nineteenth century century's industrialisation can justify coming to existence of this craft category, which instead, qualified production that has always been there in India, handmade and skills-based rather than machine based production of objects. The new category being created, it could be filled with all objects whose primary function is utilitarian, or resembling utilitarian, therefore carrying with it expectation of high skill artisans, traditional methods and by extension, ideas of heritage and authenticity – as in opposition to machine made goods without a history.

Ironically, the value of authenticity dethroned the utilitarian dimension of the paintings and provided the objects with a sense of artistry so that they could be exhibited in museums and on house-shelves, far away from their functional space. To add a few words to this, I would like to reference James Clifford's diagrams illustrating the different possibilities of exchange of categories that object may undergo as they shift from one space to the other.[45] The spaces that Clifford talks about are 'masterpieces,' 'artefacts,' 'authentic,' and 'inauthentic'.[46] What Clifford proves in his demonstration is the permeability of such categories and the constant movements of objects from one to the other, sometimes channelled through another category, sometimes directly pushed into another. If one were to apply this to Cheriyal painting, a forty centimetres square painting on paper will be seen as inauthentic in a tourist bazaar and as authentic within the IGRMS at Bhopal. Similarly, the thirteen meters long scroll is an artefact of the Nakashi painters' community and a masterpiece of the Calico museum. According to Clifford, this reveals that "cultural or artistic 'authenticity' has as much to do with an

[45] Clifford, J. "Collecting Ourselves." In *On Collecting: An Investigation Into Collecting in the European Tradition*, edited by Susan M Pearce, 159-176. London: Routledge, 1995.
[46] Ibid., 263.

inventive present as with a past, its objectification, preservation or revival."[47] Cheriyal paintings, in order to be objectified, preserved and revived, had to undergo radical changes from what they initially were – if one can actually say what they were.

As I tried to convey across this chapter and the previous one, the modifications and at times disappearance of certain aspects of the tradition was more a reflection of dynamism than a condemnable element of destruction. The entry to universal museums was at the cost of the tradition's objectification that removed the performative dimension in order to keep the paintings. This disappearance of the performance tradition justified further the necessity to preserve the tradition. The preserving task was best taken up by government-led handicraft initiatives and the handicraft market. In fact, what could be observed is that whether Cheriyal paintings were considered 'art' or 'craft' did not make much difference to the becoming of the tradition, for which their institutionalisation led to the same result, only through different routes.

[47] Ibid.

Chapter VII
Questioning the limits of Cheriyal painting

So far, we have identified the oldest and on-going function of Cheriyal painting as scrolls used in the performance of the local caste Puranas of Telangana. With the case study of the Padmasali Purana, we apprehended the fixity of the visual narrative in relation to the socio-political context of the performative tradition; but also the nature and limitation of visual changes the paintings may undergo. In addition to the scroll for performance, we then saw that Cheriyal paintings found a space within museum and handicrafts institutions. These allowed further modification of the paintings' materiality and iconography, depending on the discourse of these institutions.

These institutions also offered greater visibility to the painting and their painters, and served as intermediaries for further commissions from other patrons. These new patrons' commissions are what I would like to explore in this chapter. Across four examples, I look at specific Cheriyal paintings that were commissioned by new patrons. I chose to divide them into two categories. The first part approaches the religious and political abilities of Cheriyal paintings in the context of two institutional commissions. In the second part, I introduce for the first time private commissions of new paintings, in contrast with the private collection of already existing paintings, and the responsiveness of the tradition to these new demands. Each of the four cases I explore present important material and iconographical modifications to the extent of questioning the features that maintains these paintings connected to Cheriyal paintings. For the purpose of this chapter, I chose to present painting commissions that were particularly interesting for pictorial and political reasons, but also paintings I could gather enough information to draw a complete picture of the commission, the painting, and the relation between the painters and their patrons. In the continuity of what I have presented earlier, the chapter works as to understand these paintings starting from their material point of view, but always in relation with what its context of patronage, production or reception.

1. Images and Politics

a. From Cheriyal to Tirupati, in Delhi

The first example I would like to talk about is the commission of three Cheriyal paintings for the entrance wall of the Sri Venkateswara College in Delhi (Fig. 7. 1). The college is part of Delhi University and located in Dhaula Kuan. The director of the college, Dr. Hemalatha Reddy is at the origin of the commission, which she partly funded and launched in 2014. The painting is composed of three panels forming an arch over the entrance wall of the College. It depicts the marriage of Srinivasa with Padmavathi, the founding myth of the Venkateswara temple in Tirumala Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Madhu Merugoju was chosen to produce the painting, on the advice of Arpitha Reddy who had previously seen his work on a calendar for the Lepakshi emporia. Arpitha is a friend of Hemalatha. To go about this project, Madhu was given money, acrylic paints, a few images and indications on the format and the iconography of the painting. The triptych was completed in six months and Madhu delivered it personally to Delhi in October 2014. This painting is interesting for several reasons; but before I delve into its description, I would like to introduce briefly how the foundation of the college determined the choice of episodes for the paintings.

1. The Sri Venkateswara College in New Delhi

The Sri Venkateswara College in Delhi opened in 1961. The foundation of the college started from a request for funds by the Andhra Education Society, to support the running of senior secondary school providing Telugu medium education to Telugu speakers in Delhi.[1] In 1960, the Society called for the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Trust to acquire funds for the schools. The TTD is the Trust that has been managing the Venkateswara Temple at Tirupati since 1932. In response to the Andhran Education Society, the Devasthanams proposed to take over the running of these schools but the Society proposed them to open a college instead. The college was partly funded by the central government who provided the land, and partly by grants from the

[1] Rao, C. Anna. "History and growth of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams," in *Administration of Temples*. Tirupati (India): Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. n.d. 19.

TTD. Additionally, the TTD accepted to partake in the maintenance of the institution with annual subsidies.[2]

The Devasthanams Trust runs the important temple and pilgrimage site of Tirumala at Tirupati in the Rayalaseema region of Southern Andhra Pradesh. Tirupati is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the country and receives thousands of visitors every day, coming to worship Vishnu as Venkateshwara, also known as Balaji. It manages several temples in and around Tirupati and supports the construction of other temples across the country and abroad. For instance, they offered funding for the construction of a Sri Venkateswara temple in Pittsburgh in 1975.[3] As I noted from the *Administration of Temples,* published by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, their support is oriented towards the "propagation of Hindu Dharma (faith), Indian Culture, Indian Architecture, Renovation of Temples, Educations, Welfare Schemes and promotion of Industries for the benefit of the Public, after meeting the requirements of the Temple and the Devotees visiting the Shrine."[4] The temple earning goes in priority towards the TTD assuring the maintenance of the temples under its management, and developing facilities for the temples' devotees.[5] With the surplus, the Devasthanams contribute to other projects too such as supporting the construction of hospitals or schools. The Sri Venkateswara College in Delhi is part of the TTD's support they provide to the field of education. In relation to the construction of the college, the TTD said it "is now serving the Devasthanams as a Publicity Centre in North India while imparting education in all languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada)."[6]

The organisation makes large profit and contributes greatly to the expansion of the Sri Venkateswara faith across India and abroad through activities directly related to temples and the Vaishnavite sect but also under the name of more secular projects of welfare. In the light of this information and because the Devasthanams are at the origin of the foundation of the College, the Sri Venkateswara College in Delhi maintains close links of sponsorship with the temple site of the same name at Tirupati. This is further

[2] Ibid.
[3] Sri Venkateswara Temple Pittsburgh home page https://www.svtemple.org/Home.aspx
[4] "Contribution of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams" for promotion of Hindu Dharma, Indian Cutlure, Art, Architecture, Education, Social welfare and Industries. (Broadcast by A. I. R. Madras on 18.3. 1976) in Rao,. "History and growth of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,*"* 47.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 19.

emphasised by the choice of subject for the painting of the entrance, that of the founding myth of the Tirumala Tirupati Temple, the marriage of Venkateswara with Padmavathi.

2. The myth of Venkateswara and Padmavathi

The Venkateswara temple is located on the Venkata hill, from which the temple got its name. The presiding deity of the temple is Vishnu as Venkateswara, the god of the Venkata Hill. The myth starts from the sage Bhrigu who was sent by his fellow *rishis* (sage) to enquire which of the three divinities Brahma Shiva and Vishnu, was the worthiest of performing rituals for. Bhrigu embarked into a journey to visit all three deities starting with Brahma who did not take notice of him. After that, he visited Shiva who ignored the sage as well. Finally, he reached Vishnu who initially did not see the sage either. Bhrigu got very upset and in response, kicked Vishnu's chest at the place where Lakshmi usually resides. Vishnu reacted by apologising to the sage for having hurt his feet as he kicked him. In this instance, Bhrigu decided that Vishnu was the most supreme of the Trinity. Laksmi, however, took offence at Bhrigu hitting her husband and decided to leave as a response to their quarrel. In search of Laksmi, Vishnu came down to earth and took refuge in an anthill. Brahma and Shiva heard of the quarrel and decided to come to help Vishnu by taking the form of a cow and calf from the nearby Chola kingdom where the anthill was located. This cow would provide Vishnu everyday with milk. Realising that the cow was not giving any milk, the cowherd spied the cow and discovered that she was feeding someone else. Due to this, he attempted to kill the cow but Vishnu interfered and received the stroke instead. Then, the injured Vishnu went to take refuge with Varaha (previous incarnation of Vishnu) who offered Vishnu a refuge. There, Vakula took care of him as her own son, then renamed as Srinivasa. In the meantime, in the nearby kingdom of Akasha Raja, baby Padmavathi was found in a lotus while ploughing the field. The king Akasha was not given a child and saw this appearance as bliss. The beautiful Padmavathi grew up and one day, while Srinivasa was haunting, he stopped at a pond in the forest and saw her. They fell in love. From this moment onwards, both Srinivasa and Padmavathi fell love sick and Srinivasa urged Vakula to arrange for his proposal to Padmavathi. In the meantime, Srinivasa took the form of a fortune teller and visited Padmavathi to reassure her that she would marry Vishnu. Vakula visited Padmavathi's parents, the king and the queen, and sent the proposal for Srinivasa and Padmavathi's marriage. Everyone accepted and the marriage was finally celebrated. After the marriage, Srinivasa and Padmavathi went to live on the

Venkata hill. Laksmi then discovered that her husband married again to which Vishnu responded by changing into stone as Venkateswara. After understanding what really happened, both Laksmi and Padmavathi too, changed into stone. The hill on which Vishnu turned into stone as Venkateswara is the Venkata hill at Tirumala where the Sri Venkateswara temple is now located.

3. The myth on painting

The painting at the Venkateswara College in Delhi depicts the myth describes above in the Cheriyal painting style. The painting is composed of three panels that form an arch. Each side panel measures 261 x 193 centimetres and the middle panel arching the side panels measures 228 x 42 cm. The two side panels stand in vertical orientation and the central in horizontal so that the three combined form the arch over the entrance of the college. Following the Cheriyal conventions, the panels are divided into registers, and then subdivided into scenes in which several narrative devices are used. The marriage scene is depicted as the final single scene in the central horizontal panel. Like other Cheriyal paintings, the background is red, the colours bold and saturated, the figures depicted in profile view with few exceptions for deities. Vishnu as himself and as Srinivasa are in blue, so is Rama. Padmavathi is in pale flesh pink colour. In order to identify the narrative on the painting, I propose to divide them as seen in the diagram (Fig. 7. 2), first into each panel (1, 2, and 3), themselves divided into five registers which I numbered 1 to 5. The registers are then subdivided into scenes for which I attributed letters starting from a. The scenes have been identified with the help of Madhu and his wife as well as friends who knew the legend.

Panel no 1, left (Fig. 7. 3):

1. Ganesha beginning the narrative and the story of the sage Bhrigu:

    a. *Ganesha worship and beginning of the story:* Ganesha is in the centre, on his left a devotee with offerings, on the top, two consorts with garlands as we usually see in the scroll for performance, especially those of the Padmasali I presented in Chapter 2, and a linga as a reminder of Shiva being Ganesha's father.

b. *The rishis conducting Yagna (sacrificial fire ritual).* Narada with a green musical instrument on his shoulder comes from the left and questions the three sages sitting around the fire about whom they are performing the ritual for.

c. *The three rishis meeting Bhrigu*: Not knowing whom the sacrificial fire should be devoted to, the three rishis reach out to Bhrigu (sitting on the left) and request him to enquire who is the greatest of all three deities among Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu for whom the sacrifice should be performed.

d. *Bhrigu meets Brahma*: Brahma is sitting on a lotus, busy with his consort Saraswati while Bhrigu visits him.

e. *Bhrigu meets Shiva*. Shiva wears a tiger skin and he is busy dancing with Parvathi as Bhrigu visits him.

f. *Vishnu on Shesha*: Vishnu is sleeping on Shesha while Laksmi is at his feet. Bhrigu arrives and gets angry because Vishnu does not pay attention to him either. He kicks Vishnu in the chest. Vishnu then apologises for having hurt Bhrigu and releases Bhrigu's third eye by massaging his feet. Bhrigu then decides Vishnu is the greatest of all Gods.

g. Vishnu and Laksmi's quarrel: Vishnu and Laksmi are arguing in the staircase after Bhrigu's hit on her husband for which she feels offended.

2. The story of Vishnu on earth:

a. *Vishnu under the ant-hill:* After Visfnu and Laksmi's quarrel, Laksmi left the heavenly abode Vaikuntha and came down to earth. As Vishnu searches for her, he takes refuge in an ant-hill where he lies.

b. *Brahma and Shiva as cow and calf:* Both Brahma and Shiva feel heartened by the quarrel between Vishnu and Laksmi and take the form of a cow and a calf to come and help Vishnu. They are depicted as transforming in the forefront of the scene. Brahma as multi headed and Shiva as wearing the tiger's skin. In the meantime, on the top of the scene, the Sun god Surya speaks to Laksmi about Brahma and Shiva's plan and requests her to facilitate the cow and calf's entry to the kingdom

where Vishnu stays by taking the appearance of a cowherd and selling the animals to the King.

c. The two scenes identified as c. and d. are a bit confused and c. may be Laksmi in green in the middle with her servant behind her, negotiating the cow's exchange with the cowherd. In the scene d. it may be Laksmi again in green in the middle holding the cow and possibly delivering the cow and calf to the Chola king on the left, himself raising his hand as a gesture to indicate the cowherd on the right to take them to graze in the hills.

d. *Cow feeding Vishnu on the ant-hill.* The cow emptying its udders for Vishnu to drink. The cowherd hidden on the right sees it.

3. Vishnu taking refuge to Varaha and introduction of Padmavathi into the story:

a. *Vishnu saving the cow:* Realising that his cow is not providing any milk because she feeds Vishnu under the ant-hill, the cowherd (in green dhoti) gets angry and attempts to kill the cow with a stick (left side of the scene). Vishnu comes to save the cow and receives the stroke instead. His head is bleeding. On the top of the scene, the cowherd realised his mistake and dies (he is lying). On the right of the scene, Vishnu scolds the King for his mistake and utters a curse.

b. *Vishnu asks Varaha for refuge:* Now that Vishnu left the ant-hill and was injured, he takes refuge at Varaha's, half boar half human, a previous incarnation of Vishnu and stays there where Vakula, probably the female figure in green sitting on Varaha will take care of him as her own son. At this moment, Vishnu is renamed as Srinivasa.

c. *The ploughing and discovery of Padmavathi:* On the nearby Kingdom of Akasha Raja, A baby girl in a lotus is found while ploughing, Padmavathi. Akasha Raja was not given a child and takes this adopts the baby girl.

4. Padmavathi's upbringing and encounter with Vishnu:

    a. *Baby girl brought to the King:* Under Vishnu's well-wishing eye, on the top of the baby, the baby girl Padmavathi is adopted by the King and Queen as their own daughter. A servant is behind the Queen.
    b. *Padmavathi hearing about her marriage with Vishnu from a sage:* The sage Narada (also said to be Vishnu in disguised in certain version) reads Padmavathi's palm and predicts her marriage to Vishnu. Padmavathi is accompanied by her maids.
    c. *Srinivasa goes haunting and meets Padmavathi with her maids:* Vishnu as Srinivasa on a horse, arrive in the forest and frightens Padmavathi and her maids.

5. Vishnu's encounter with Padmavathi:

    a. *Padmavathi and Vishnu's encounter:* Vishnu falls in love with Padmavathi (left part of the scene) the maids do not like the encounter. As Srinivasa tries to explain who he is, the maids do not believe him and send him away (second part of the scene on the right).
    b. *Vishnu lovesick:* Vishnu feels lovesick, lies on his bed and does not eat the food made available to him on the table next to it. Vakula notices Vishnu's distress.

Panel no. 2, right (Fig. 7. 4):

1. Ramayana scene of the abduction of Sita:

    a. *Vishnu explaining Vakula his love for Padmavathi*
    b. *Ramayana scene where Agni replaces Sita with Vedavati:* This scene is taken from the Ramayana and justifies the existence and the marriage of Srinivasa to Padmavathi. On the left, the multi-headed Ravana comes to take Sita away. In the middle of the scene, Sita goes into the fire (Agni) and Agni, the fire god takes her away to replace her with Vedavati instead. Agni is in frontal view on the top of Sita / Vedavati. On the right

section of the scene, Vedavati under the form of Sita is taken away to Lanka by Ravana.

c. *Padmavathi explains her parents her love for Srinivasa:* This scene functions as a parallel to the scene a. where Srinivasa also explains Vakula her love for Padmavathi. Both the scenes circle the flashback that justifies the marriage of Vishnu with Padmavathi.

2. Ramayana scene of Sita presented in front of Rama after she came back from Lanka:

    a. *The fire test of Sita*: The following event is necessary to understand the marriage as well. On the left, Rama, accompanied by Laksmana and Hanuman. In the middle, Sita entering the fire after Rama refuses to believe her purity. Agni rescues Sita to prove her purity to Rama. In the second section divided by the middle tree, Vedavati in front of Rama and Sita sitting. Behind them Hanuman, Laksmana and another Monkey soldier. Because Vedavati was taken away with Ravana to Lanka instead of Sita, Sita requests Rama to marry Vedavati. Rama refuses and promises to marry her in the next life. In that next life, Vedavati will be Padmavathi and Rama will be Vishnu.
    b. *Vakula encountering Padmavathi and her maids:* Vakula on the left meets with Padmavathi in green and her maids behind her as they were coming back from the Shiva temple. The maids explain Padmavathi's love for Srinivasa.

3. The proposal to Padmavathi

    a. *The king consulting the sages:* The king is consulting the sages about the possibility of his daughter's marriage. They agree.
    b. *Vakula meets the queen for the proposal:* Vakula is standing on the left in a grey saree, the queen is sitting on the floor with a brown saree with possibly her servant.
    c. *Vakula meets lovesick Padmavathi:* The Princess is lying on her bed, a servant behind her.

d. *Padmavathi receives the visit of a fortune-teller:* The fortune teller, said to be Vishnu in disguise comes to meet.

4. Confirmation of the marriage

    a. *The fortune-teller telling Padmavathi about her marriage with Vishnu:* The fortune teller on the right is speaking to Padmavathi and someone else in blue, possibly her servant. This is the moment when Padmavathi gets confirmation that she will marry Vishnu.
    b. *Padmavathi and the Queen discussing:* Padmavathi in green on the right discusses with her mother the queen, in brown on the left, possibly revealing the information of the fortune teller and the real identity of Srinivasa. They are surrounded by servants and the marriage is approved.
    c. *King consulting the sages:* the king calls all the sages and fixes the date of the marriage and sends the invitation.

5. The marriage invitation

    a. *Vishnu receives the message of the marriage from Sukamahamunin:* Vakula in grey, behind Vishnu receive the invitation for the marriage from Suka, a green parrot-like character and reliable messenger coming from the right.
    b. *Vishnu invites Brahma and Shiva:* Vishnu in the middle comes to deliver the information to Shiva (tiger skin) and Brahma (multi-headed) on the left. On the right, possibly Jaya and Vijaya, semi-god, devotees of Vishnu and gatekeepers of Vaikuntha. They are usually associated with the Venkateswara temple at Tirupati. Finally Ganesha is invited too.
    c. *Vishnu taking a gold loan from Kubera:* to bear the expenses of the holy marriage.
    d. *Vishnu on Garuda and invitees going to the marriage:* possibly followed by Padmavathi in green, and the same two characters as in the previous scene (Jaya, Vijaya).

Panel no. 3 central (Fig. 7. 5):

Marriage of Vishnu with Padmavathi: Vishnu on the left in blue, Padmavathi on the right in a white saree and a grey blouse, Akasha Raja in the middle pouring the milk, next to him the Queen. Next to Padmavathi is Vakula. The wedding invitees are not all identified. They are divided into two:
On the right characters that relate to Vishnu's part of the story. Just behind Vishnu is Bhrigu. Behind Bhrigu are two rows of invitees. In the lower row are Shiva, followed by Laksmi, Brahma, Varaha, Narada and a king. On the top row are Parvathi, Ganesha and four unidentified kings.
On the left, behind Padmavathi: characters that relate to Padmavathi's part of the story. Behind Vakula, there are two rows of invitees. In the lower row are Suka, Hanuman, Garuda and possibly Rama and Laksmana. On the top row are another King and Queen, possibly the Chola King and Queen at the time Vishnu resided in the ant-hill. Behind them a sage followed by two other kings.

4. Negotiating traditions

The story of Venkateswara is that of the founding myth of the temple site of Tirumala at Tirupati located in Andhra Pradesh in South India. The temple is an important pilgrimage site for Indians coming from all over the country and from abroad. As the presiding deity of the temple is a form of Vishnu, the site is particularly important for South Indian Vaishnavite Hindus. With this painting, the founding myth of the temple has been relocated to the entrance wall of a college in Delhi. In addition to this, it is a deeply rooted painting tradition from rural Telangana that has been chosen to do so. Cheriyal painting as they were initially used for performances, narrate caste Puranas. These Puranas usually take episodes of better-known Maha-Puranas to support the legitimisation of these castes for which the performance take place. Here however, the painting tradition has shifted from its original context in vernacular Telangana Hinduism to a South Indian Vaishnavite myth as presented in Delhi.

If the college's affiliation to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams justifies the subject of the painting, the choice of the Cheriyal style for such commission poses questions. Because Arpitha Reddy knew both Madhu and Hemalatha, the cooperation was based on a mutual acquaintance which is partly the reason for choosing a Cheriyal style

painting. The other reason comes from Hemalatha's intentions with the paintings. While discussing the iconography, she explained to me that the painting should represent something deeply rooted into Andhran culture so that it reminds the affiliations of the college of the Venkateswara consciousness. At the same time, she expected this not to be too openly religious and believed the folk style of Cheriyal painting could convey this 'less religious' flavour.[7] She expected the subject of Venkateswara's marriage with Padmavathi not to be understood only in religious terms and insisted on this particular aspect. She also understood that the students may not be worshippers of Venkateswara but she felt the duty to keep the connection with the name of the college. The painting therefore, is a signifier of thoughtful negotiations between the religious institution of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, the folk style of Cheriyal painting and the educational vocation of the college.

One may wonder, however, how strictly this translated into the commission and into the production of this painting. For instance, the students of the college may be from South India, especially Telugus and would have a basic knowledge of the temple legend as reported on the wall. But the college is a prestigious institution and located in Delhi, which appeals to students from various regions of the country, not necessarily aware of the college's relation with the south Indian Vaishnavite myth. This is taken further when the painting tradition that represents this localised myth is itself even more localised. This is important for the meaning that Cheriyal paintings undergo in their movements and for what this thesis tries to explain. Cheriyal paintings, in representing a myth far from their usual iconography but even further in the location where the painting is displayed, crossed two different spheres: a religious one and a geographical one. As it entered a national educational institution in the capital, it did so through the adaptation of a South Indian Vaishnavite myth.

In addition to these two layers in the evolution of the painting tradition, the painter himself brings another one. Madhu represents the folk Cheriyal artist which strictly speaking he is not. In spite of his training as a Cheriyal painter who should primarily paint long scrolls of the caste narratives of Telangana, in reality Madhu never painted a scroll. He was only trained later, as part of the government's initiatives to revive the craft. At that time, the scroll production had declined and the government and

[7] 21/04/2015 Discussion with Dr. Hemalatha Reddy at the Sri Venkateshwara College in Delhi.

handicrafts commissions had already taken over the majority of the production. He started his career as a painter of the 'new' Cheriyal paintings as I presented them in the previous chapter. This owed him a marginalised status that discounted him from most of the painting activities that relate to the local communities around Cheriyal. As a counterpart, he enjoyed the favours for these special commissions and he is regularly contacted for such orders, mostly with the mediation of the Lepakshi Emporium. Madhu is therefore not the exemplary Cheriyal artist who is deeply rooted into the Telangana folklore, but a painter that can negotiate best the several aspects of such commissions instead.

5. The painting

To appreciate best the painter's response to such a commission, let us turn to the pictorial features of the painting. I would like to focus on Madhu's peculiar style in comparison with the other Cheriyal painters and explain how his marginal position in the tradition influences his work, especially here with the painting for the Venkateswara College. The College had very few but specific criteria for this painting. The most important was the iconography, which we just described above. With regards to material, the college requested that the painting be painted with acrylic. Apart from the iconography and the technique, the painter was free to depict the narrative in the usual style of Cheriyal painting. This translated in the division of the narrative into scenes, the red background, the folk and stylised characters and the borders.

The inclusion of acrylic instead of watercolour created a more homogenous and polished effect on the painting. The red background is filled with flatter tint spaces, the figures, trees, and architectural elements are brighter and less marked by the brushstrokes. This does not remove in any way the stylisation of the figures and their usual stiff depiction in profile with few exceptions and the painting remains fundamentally Cheriyal. The colours however, enjoy greater variety, probably due to the broader capacity of the acrylic palette and blends. The predominance of grey for both male and female costumes for instance is not usually seen in other Cheriyal paintings. Primary colours are usually favoured with very few earthen colours. Here, shades of brown, ochre and yellow are subtler and give a greater sense of harmony to the painting. The painting shows greater variety of tree designs as well, with nine different shades of green dispersed across eleven registers.

6. Architectural elements

As in other Cheriyal paintings, architectural elements play an important role in separating scenes. Apart from a greater variety of curtain colours and motives, there are two particular scenes that demand attention in this painting. The first one is in the first panel, at the end of the first register (Fig. 7. 3. 1. g). The first half of the register depicts an image of Ganesha and two small narrative scenes, one onto the other and divided horizontally. After Ganesha, the narrative is divided into four major scenes, two of them in two small squares on the top where Bhrigu visits Brahma and Shiva, and the other two in continuous narrative from the top right to the entire bottom part of the register. Here, Vishnu is arguing with Laksmi while coming down a staircase. The inclusion of the staircase here serves to link the lower scene where Bhrigu meets Vishnu to the final argument where Laksmi eventually leaves Vishnu. In diagonal across the register, the architectural device separates the scenes but also indicate the connection between them. One may even want to see in this, the metaphorical descent of Laksmi to earth as a result of the argument with her husband; although this could not be confirmed with the painter. The various functions of this one single motif are particularly ingenious and the staircase is painted as a border as well, in alternating green and red dots on a yellow thick line as we can see across the painting. The fine yellow border is at the same time a border that separates two scenes and an architectural element that represents the staircase of a key scene in the narrative.

The second element I would like to look at is in the second panel, the second scene of the third register (Fig. 7. 4. 3. b.). The identification of this scene is rather speculative and I could not get confirmation from the painter but it seems to be Vakula meeting the queen mother of Padmavathi to officially propose her daughter to marry Srinivasa. On this scene, two female characters are sitting on the ground. In the background, two houses are painted in perspective, translated by the wall and roof lines converging to the vanishing point. In Cheriyal paintings, space is usually translated through the superposition or the addition of several elements one after the other in a hierarchical order. For instance, Vishnu under the ant-hill is such translation (Fig. 7. 3. 2. a.). Here however, the attempt is naturalistic and indicates a shift in conventions. This slight change in the depiction of space is something I could observe elsewhere in the scroll of the Markandeya Purana that was painted for the Indira Gandhi Manav Rashtriya Sangrahalaya in Bhopal as well. Vaikuntam painted this scroll and on the eight register,

there is a farming scene where the field is painted in 'perspective' too (Fig. 7. 6). This was not seen in previous scroll and indicates the inclusion of a naturalistic device in the Cheriyal painting tradition. I would like to note here that this attempt at perspective is seen only in the case of the village houses and for the field scenery. No depiction of shrine or palaces showed similar device. On that account, I believe the farm scenes to be a later inclusion to the painting tradition, due to the intervention of the handicraft sector and its emphasis on authentic rural scenes. This translates into an increase of what the painters and the retailers call 'village scene' and which represent a secular adaptation of the painting style (Fig. 7. 7). For this reason, this perspective is not seen in any painting prior to the 1980s.

7. Hands and feet

As the Cheriyal painting style is highly narrative, it develops a wide range of device to convey the characters' messages. Unlike western painting tradition that emphasises naturalistic depiction of the face and body movement, Cheriyal painting opts for an insistence on hand gestures. Because of the performance tradition it is attached to, Cheriyal paintings were essentially painted to be seen from far and naturalism was not a pre-requisite for understanding the narrative. Sharp body postures and gestures however, allow communication between the characters. This sharp and usually codified hand gestures may be seen to as *mudras* (hand gesture) and is an important part of the Cheriyal painting's narrative. They convey messages of blessing, demanding attention, approval, salutation, hiding, offering and so forth. Vaikuntam's hands are usually naturalistic and Nageshwar's soft and slender. In contrast, Madhu's hands and feet are usually chunky, big and disproportionate, which is particularly evident in this painting. Each character has a hand lifted, a foot stepping, a face looking upwards and it feels as if every one of them had something to say. The scene I already presented where Vishnu and Laksmi are quarrelling in the staircase is particularly explicit with regards to this communicative gesture (Fig. 7. 3. 1. g). While Vishnu's hands convey his attempt to pacify the situation with explanations, Laksmi's one hand clearly counters Vishnu's and she seems to have made up her mind not to listen. Overall, this style gives the impression of having firmly grounded and stable characters, engaged in loud conversation. The figures' noses are bigger and sharper too, almost distorted at times. Finally, the figures are chunky and occasional pleats are suggested in the hip region, rarely seen in other Cheriyal paintings (Fig. 7. 5 Vakula). This grounded and stable

feeling is further emphasised by the stability of the registers, the borders and architectural elements carefully drawn on straight lines and contributes to the overall harmony of the painting surface.

8. Style

The combination of all the above-mentioned pictorial elements offers a slightly different effect than what we usually see with other contemporary Cheriyal paintings. At first, the overall organisation of the pictorial space, the colours, the figures, all seem similar. Yet, there is in this painting a sense of unity of the whole which is not always the case in Cheriyal painting. The careful depiction of straight lines, grounded figures and architectural elements gives a more uniform sense of composition. In this process, the feeling of imperfection is masked and it is a polished painting that we are looking at. The use of acrylic, more covering than watercolours, enhances this impression. Madhu's peculiar relation with the tradition, as a 'trained' outsider, allows him to master the Cheriyal painting conventions such as the division of space and at the same time to be emancipated from it by including innovative motives. After he completed this painting, we discussed his depiction of jewellery and he explained to me his particular liking for heavy ornaments and the liberty he takes in insisting on this particular motif. The 'personal' relation he develops with certain motif goes beyond the painting conventions and belongs to his own individuality.

9. Conclusion

As a conclusion, one may see this commission of a Cheriyal painting for a Hindu college in Delhi as a discordant project. The gap between the deeply rooted origin of these paintings and what they are now representing is significant. Indeed, the goal of these caste Puranas was to elevate the status of lower castes among the society then in place. In being reused as the Venkateswara iconography, it marries the inclusion of a South Indian myth, related to the Pan-Indian Vaishnavite faith, to the depth of the Telangana folklore. In reverse, it brings the Telangana folklore as part of the South Indian Vaishnavite identity. These are very strong cultural movements that could have a deeper impact on the future of the Cheriyal painting, once the performance tradition is extinct, then remaining as purely Hindu, homogenised Vaishnavite and no longer having any connection with the local mythologies of Telangana. At the same time, it is important to see that it is not the Cheriyal 'scroll painting' tradition that is used here.

Through Madhu, it is already a tradition altered by the intervention of the government that is used for the painting at the College, and it is not a single and framed way of doing Cheriyal painting that we are talking about but several.

b. **A Cheriyal Ramayana in Ayodhya**

In the following case study, I present a 2013 commission of ten panels of the Ramayana for the Ram Katha Museum in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. As with the case for the painting of the Sri Venkateswara College, Hindu religious politics play an important part in understanding this commission. For the same reasons too, the institutional building in which they are displayed brings new dimensions to the rooted folklore of Telangana. The Ram Katha commission however takes this further on to the scale of the nation by recalling the Pan-Indian appeal of the Ramayana story. At first, I will go through stylistic and iconographical features of this commission and what it highlights about this painting in comparison with other Cheriyal productions. Then, I will look at the museum display capacities and its museology to understand the collection of objects that is presented, particularly this series of Cheriyal paintings. Finally, I replace the Cheriyal paintings in the context of the other objects exhibited in the museums and explain the relations with the Hindutva politics for which the town is often cited.

1. The Ram Katha Museum in Ayodhya

The Ram Katha Sangrahalaya museum was established in 1996 but the institution has been in place since 1988 in working towards the promotion of the Ram *katha*, (the story of Rama). The museum is engaged in collecting, preserving and conserving antiquities that relate to the story of Rama.[8] It is an archaeological museum that proposes historical and archaeological evidence of Rama's relation with the town of Ayodhya. The museum is situated inside the Tulsi Smarak Bhawan, which was built by the Government of India in 1969 and that now comes under the cultural department of Government of Uttar Pradesh. In its premises, there is a hall used for prayers meeting and religious discourse, a research institute called the Ayodhya Shodh Sansthan, which was established in 1986, and a library. The centre plays the role of a cultural centre for performing arts and the Ramlila (theatrical performance of the Ramayana) is performed

[8] 23/06/2014 Discussion with Avinash Kumar, curator of the Ram Katha Museum Ayodhya

every day as well. The entry for the museum is free and the place is a small provincial exhibition space. Artefacts however, are regularly collected and stored for display in a bigger building to come. According to the chief curator Avinash Kumar, all sorts of visitors visit the museum and even if the museum attendance is rather low, there are always between two to five people visiting every day. At the time of my visit on the 23rd of June 2014, there were a small group of young boys and a couple who spent more time sitting and chatting on the staircase of the entrance than viewing the artefacts. Visitors removed shoes and consider the artefact sacred. Not many foreigners visit the museum and the labels are almost all in Hindi. The city of Ayodhya does not have much to offer apart from religious architecture and the museum is intended for locals who either live in the region or are visiting for religious purposes. The place is said to be the birth place of Rama and an important setting for the Ramayana. This belief has made Ayodhya a place of violent religious conflicts for the last twenty years, which I shall explain in detail later. The purpose of the museum is clearly to historicise the story of Rama in collecting artefacts that relate to it, and in using the authority of the museum as a place of 'truth.' for the display of the "Ram Katha."

2. Summary of the Vaikuntam's Ramayana (Fig. 7. 8 to 7. 17)

Writing a summary of the Ramayana is not a simple task. As observed by Paula Richman and explored across two collections of essays on the Epic, the Ramayana does not have one version but several various versions.[9] These versions vary depending on who narrates it, for which audience and in which context. Because of this multiplicity and the context-specific nature of the Epic, it is difficult to summarise it without having to take one version as an example. For this reason, I chose not to summarize any particular version other than the one on Vaikuntam's painting for the Ram Katha Museum. Because I identified the scene without Vaikuntam' support however, there may be characters and elements of the narrative that I could not grasp or identify. I opted for a chronological description that follows the order of registers on the painting. As I describe a scene, I indicate which register and scene it refers to by allocating number for each registers and letters for each scene. Each register is usually divided into two or three scenes, separated by architectural or natural element, Due to the length of the narrative, I did not name each characters or developed each scene in great detail but

[9] Kampar, and Paula Richman ed. *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Berkeley, CA; Oxford: University of California, 1991. and Richman, Paula ed. *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

tried to tie the whole together instead in the most understanding and narrative way possible.

3. Painting description

Panel 1 (Fig. 7. 8):

After the auspicious image of Ganesha (register 1. a.), Vaikuntam Nakash's Ramayana begins with Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya and father of Rama, talking to three villagers of the kingdom. Dasaratha then goes on a deer hunt; he mistakes a young boy near a lake for a deer and shoots him. The fatally injured boy happened to be Shravan who was on a pilgrimage with his old and blind parents. The boys dying wish was that the king brings his thirsty parents some water and tells them the truth of what happened to their son (reg. 1. b.). Dasaratha goes to the parents who curse him that he too, would die without the presence of a son near him (reg. 2. a.). Some time passes and Dasaratha is now in his kingdom, consulting sages about conducting a *yagna* (ritual) in order to get an heir (reg. 2. b.). The king conducts the ritual from which some potion is extracted and given to drink to his three queen consorts (reg. 2. c.). The three queens drink their share of the potion (reg. 3. a.). Kausalya gives birth to Rama, Kaikeyi gives birth to Bharata, Sumitra gives birth to the twins Laksmana and Satrughna (reg. 3. b.). After the children have grown up, the sages Vishwamitra and Vashista suggest Dasaratha to send his two sons Rama and Laxman to kill the demons that stop them from conducting their rituals (reg. 4. a.). The king and queen then send Rama and Laxmana to the forest (reg. 4. b.), where the boys receive education (reg. 5. a.) with Vishwamitra and help getting rid of the demoness Tataka (reg. 5. b.) as well as many other demons interfering in the sages' rituals (reg. 6. a.). While the two boys are in the forest receiving their education, a messenger brings the news of King Janak from the kingdom of Mithila, holding a *Swayamvar,* the ceremony to choose a suitable groom for his daughter Sita (reg. 6. b.). Rama's teacher decides to take the boy to the ceremony. On the way, Rama releases Ahalya by the touch of his feet, from a curse that had turned her into stone (reg. 6. c.). As he reaches Mithila with his brother and his teacher, Rama is warmly welcome with king Janak and his court (reg. 7). The challenge to be deemed suitable of Sita is to lift a bow that Shiva had gifted Parashuram to thank him for his devotion. Rama does not only lift the bow but breaks it too, for which his marriage with Sita is approved (reg. 8. a.). The marriage takes place (central scene) with the symbolic breaking of the bow. As

the wedding procession returns from Mithila, the angry immortal Parashuram rushes to Ayodhya where Rama reveals himself as an incarnation of Vishnu and calms his anger (reg. 8. b.).

Panel 2 (Fig. 7. 9):

Dasaratha's four children have now completed their education and married. They return to Ayodhya where the queen mothers welcome them (reg. 1). Dasaratha discusses the matters of the kingdom's succession with the sages and all agree that Rama should become king upon Dasaratha's death as he is the eldest (reg. 2). Dasaratha's second wife Kaikeyi does not agree to this decision and requests her king to grant her the two boons he had given her earlier when she saved his life (reg. 3. a.). The first one is that her own son Bharata be crowned instead of Rama and the second is that Rama must go into exile for 14 years. Dasaratha cannot refuse and accepts Kaikeyi's two boons and falls ill knowing that his son will be sent away (reg. 3. b.). Rama takes blessings from his mother (reg. 3. c.) from his ill father (reg. 4. a.) and from the sage (reg. 4. b.). Rama, Sita and Laxmana discuss with the sage who will accompany them to the Chitrakuta forest (reg. 5. a. and reg. 6). They now leave (5. b.). Rama, Sita, and Laxmana leave for the forest, escorted by a convoy. The princesses offer farewell (reg. 7). They are dropped as far as possible from the ridges of the kingdom where they meet the boatman who will take them across the river. There, they meet the sage Bhardwaja who will further aid them to reach their destination, deeper into the Chitrakuta forest (reg. 8).

Panel 3 (Fig. 7. 10):

In the forest, Rama, Sita, and Laxmana stop and share a meal with the sage Bhardwaja (reg. 1. a.). They then embark for the rest of their journey by taking the sage's blessings (reg. 1. b.). They cross the river with a self-made raft (reg. 2. a.) and finally reach the Chitrakuta forest where Rama requests Laxmana to build a hut for their shelter (reg. 2. b. and reg. 3. a). Meanwhile in Ayodhya, the convoy returns and confirms that Rama is now in the forest (reg. 3. b.). Hearing the news, Dasaratha falls ill again and realises that the prophecy he heard from Shravan's father a long time ago was going to be fulfilled. He begins to remember the moment he hunted the deer and killed Shravan instead (reg. 4. b.). Shravan father's curse that said he would die without the presence of his son, and the time he performed funeral rites Shravan and his parents joined the pyre (reg. 5).

King Dasaratha dies while Rama is away (reg. 6. a.). The Brahmin priest urges Vasishta the royal priest to choose a new king (reg. 6. b.). Vashishta then sends messengers to fetch Bharata who was then at his maternal uncle's place in Rajagriha (reg. 6. b.). The messengers cross rivers and rushes as fast as possible to bring the bad news to Bharata (Reg. 7). The messengers arrive (reg. 8. a.) and bring the news to Bharata who had sensed the tragedy in his dream (reg. 8. b.).

Panel 4 (Fig. 7. 11):

Bharata is asked to come to Ayodhya (reg. 1. a.). He leaves with the messengers as fast as possible (reg. 1. b.). He enters the city of Ayodhya and goes to the palace (reg. 2. a), but instead of finding his father there, he sees an empty throne (reg. 2. b.). Bharata then goes to meet his mother, Kaikeyi (reg. 2. c.). There she informs him about the demise of the king and the exile of Rama. Bharata discusses the situation with the queens in order to understand what has happened and refuses to get on the throne instead of Rama (reg. 2. d.). He talks to the other two queen mothers (reg. 3. a.). Finally, he consults Vashishta, the royal priest who gives him some advices (reg. 3. b). Bharata decides to go and fetch bring Rama back to Ayodhya. Altogether, Bharata, his brother Shatrughna, and the wives along with a lot of people from the kingdom embark in a journey to find Rama in the forest (reg. 4). They cross the river and meet with priests on the way (reg. 5, 6, and 7). Bharata eventually reaches the forest where Rama is showing the beauty of the lake and river to Sita (reg. 8. a.). Sita meets with the princesses (reg. 8. b.) while Bharata meets Rama and conveys the news of their father's death and request him to come back and take the throne. Rama refuses as he wishes to hold his promise. Bharata eventually agrees to rule but only as regent until Rama comes back. He brings Rama's footwear as a symbol of the rightful king's rule to the kingdom (reg. 8. c.).

Panel 5 (Fig. 7. 12):

The convoy goes back to Ayodhya (reg. 1. a.). Bharat has brought Rama's footwear as a symbol of his brother's hold of the throne (reg. 1. b.). He is welcome as the king (reg. 1. c.). The queen-mothers (Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi) along with the royal priests and ministers, in the presence of the two brothers, crown Ram's sandals as the ruler of Ayodhya and Bharat as the regent (reg. 2). Meanwhile, Rama, Sita, and Laxmana leave Chitrakuta, and enter another beautiful forest named Dandaka (reg. 3). There, Ram

encounters a demon called Viradha. Viradha is a demon by curse, earlier a devotee of goddess Laxmi. As Sita is an incarnation of Laxmi, he tries to lift her (reg. 4. a.) but Rama intervenes and kills the demon, releasing a good soul from it (reg. 4. b.). The released soul then advises Rama to go and meet the sage Sharabhanga (reg. 4. c). Rama meets the sage and he is thanked (reg. 5. a.). The two discuss killing other demons that harass the sages and hermits living in the forest. Rama is given food (reg. 5. b.). After quite a long period of time, Rama meets with the vulture Jatayu whom will later give him an important message about the abduction of Sita (reg. 6. a.). After that, the demoness Shurpanakha who happens to be Ravana's sister enters the plot. She tries to attract Rama's attention and Laxman angry, cuts her nose (reg. 6. b.). Shurpanakha then rushes to another demon Khara living in the forest and tells him about invaders in the forest (Rama and Laxmana) (reg. 7. a.). Khara decides to send an army to send them away (reg. 7. b.) and while Rama and Sita are safe in the forest (reg. 8. a.), Laxmana defeats the army (reg. 8).

Panel 6 (Fig. 7. 13):

Rama thanks Laxmana for having protected them from Shurpanakha (reg. 1. a.) while Shurpanakha goes to her brother and complains about what happened to her in the forest (reg. 1. b). Ravana decides to intervene and discusses the matter with his right-man Marich (reg. 2. a.). He sends Marich to the forest disguised as a golden deer so that he could lure Rama and Laxmana away to hunt him while Ravana would abduct Sita. Marich turns into a golden deer and as Sita sees it, she asks Rama to go and hunt that deer down for her (reg. 2. b.). Rama goes hunting the deer and asks Laxmana to look after Sita (reg. 2. c.). When Rama finally kills the deer, the animal turns into Marich (reg. 3. a.). Meanwhile, Sita is worried about her husband and sends Laxmana to look for him. Laxmana refuses but Sita insists and the brother goes looking for Rama. He casts a spell and draws a line around Sita that she should not crossed to stay safe (reg. 3. b.). He then leaves (reg. 3. c.). While both brothers are away, Ravana appears to Sita in the forest, disguised as a sage so that Sita does not feel endangered (reg. 4. a.). The sage insists that Sita crosses the line to give him food. Sita crosses the line and Ravana finally abducts her (reg. 4. b.). On the way, Jatayu tries to stop Ravana but gets injured (reg. 4. c.). Ravana and Sita continue their journey and Sita drops her jewellery on the ground. Two monkeys among them Sugriva find the jewellery (reg. 5. a.). Sita is finally brought to Lanka, Ravana's kingdom and Ravana proposes to marry her. Sita refuses

and she is then sent to stay in a garden named Ashok Vatika (reg. 5. b.). Laxmana meets Rama and Rama asks him about Sita (reg. 6. a.). Both brothers go back to the hut and cannot find her there (reg. 6. b.). While looking for Sita, Rama sees the injured Jatayu who explains what happened to Sita (reg. 7. a.). Jataya dies and Rama performs his funeral rites (reg. 7. b.). Soon after, Rama and Laxmana face another demon named Kabandha whom they kill in cutting his arms and release from his curse (reg. 7. c.). Rama and Laxmana are still searching for Sita. On the way, they meet Shabari, an old lady who offers Rama sweet berries (reg. 8. a.). Rama also meets with a priest (reg. 8. b.) and then with Sugriva, the monkey who earlier found Sita's jewellery. Sugriva is with his companion Hanuman and both meet with Rama and Laxmana (reg. 8. c.)

Panel 7 (Fig. 7. 14):

The story now shifts to Rama helping Sugriva. Because Sugriva found Sita's jewellery, Rama asks him for help finding Sita. In return, Rama must help Sugriva solving trouble at his kingdom. Sugriva is Vali's younger brother and wishes to get the throne of the monkey kingdom of Kishkindha instead of his brother. Rama comes for help. He first shows his mastery of archery by cutting through seven coconut trees in a row with one arrow (reg. 1). Sugriva challenges Vali to fight so that Rama could kill him and he can access the throne. They fight once first and Rama is not able to kill Vali because he and his brother Sugriva look alike (reg. 2. a.). Before the second fight, Rama gives a garland to Sugriva so that he can differentiate the two brothers (reg. 2. b.). As Vali and Sugriva fight, Rama breaks the code of warriors and shoots Vali with an arrow in his back (reg. 3. a.). Rama explains Vali's wife and son the agreement he entered with Sugriva that led to the killing of their husband and father Vali (reg. 3. b.). Sugriva now accesses the throne as the king of Kishkindha with Rama's blessings (reg. 4. a.). As per the agreement, Rama seating on the mountain asks Sugriva to locate Sita. Sugriva sends his army to locate her (reg. 4. b.). Sugriva sends his army of monkeys everywhere (reg. 5). As the army goes south, they reach the ocean (reg. 6. a.). The army gets frightened but Hanuman is courageous and leaps off the sea (reg. 6. b.). As he crosses the ocean, he encounters the sea demoness Surasa from whom he escapes (reg. 7. a.). Arriving at Lanka, he kills Lankini, the demoness guardian of Lanka (reg. 7. b). In Lanka, Hanuman observes what happens. He sees Ravana (reg. 8. a.). He gets up to a tree and sees Ravana coming to meet Sita (reg. 8. b).

Panel 8 (Fig. 7. 15):

After Ravan leaves, Hanuman meets Sita and tells her about Rama coming to save her. Sita does not believe Hanuman who shows her a ring signet so that she understands he is a messenger of Rama (reg. 1. a.). As Hanuman discusses with Sita, a demoness sees everything and reports it to Ravana (reg. 1. a.) Ravan sends his son Indrajit to capture Hanuman (reg. 1. c.) Hanuman then is brought to Ravana's court (reg. 2. b.). Hanuman threatens Ravana and tells him about Rama. He sits on his own tail by enlarging it to show his magical power (reg. 2. a.). Ravan gets angry and orders demons to kill Hanuman (reg. 2. a.). The demons prepare ropes and fire to burn Hanuman (reg. 3. a.). Hanuman's tail sets on fire and he runs away burning the entire city behind him (reg. 3. b). As he realises that Sita may be in danger because of the fire, he goes to her and gives her jewellery to show Rama when he comes (reg. 3. c.). Hanuman then runs to the ocean from Lanka and reaches Mount Mainaka (reg. 4. a.). He crosses the ocean (reg. 4. b.) and arrives at his kingdom where he is welcomed by his fellow monkey soldiers (reg. 4. c.). He gives Rama the ring signet and consoles him about Sita (reg. 4. d.). Hanuman then explains Rama about Sita's condition in Lanka (reg. 5. a.) and they embark on saving her. Hanuman carries Rama on his shoulder (reg. 5. b.). Rama, Laksmana, and Hanuman reach the ocean and with the help of the architect Nala, they build a bridge to cross to Lanka (reg. 6.). At present, Ravana's brother Vibhishan who betrayed his brother has joined Rama's company. Rama sends a message to Ravana through Hanuman (reg. 7. a.). Hanuman delivers the message and angry Ravana discusses a potential attack on Rama with his courtiers (reg. 7. b.). Rama discusses the war with Hanuman and the organisation of the coming battles (reg. 8).

Panel 9 (Fig. 7. 16):

Ravana is now talking to Sita and tells her that she will eventually have to marry him (reg. 1. a.), after which he goes back to the court (reg. 1. b.). Hanuman and his army are now fighting against Ravana's army along with Rama and Laxmana (reg. 2, 3, and 4). Ravana's son Meghnad fights the two brothers Rama and Laxmana and Hanuman's army. Other demons have been sent to fight the army too. Meghnad injures Rama and Laxmana who both fall unconscious (reg. 5 left). Only certain plants can rescue them. Hanuman goes to the Himalayas and brings back with him the whole mountain of Dronagiri where the plants grow, as well as the sage doctor who can help saving the

brothers. Rama and Laxmana (reg. 5 right) are saved. Ravana is informed of the calamity (reg. 6. a.) and decides to join the war (reg. 6. b.).

Panel 10 (Fig. 7. 17):

Ravana's brother Kumbhakarna is now woken up. Kumbhakama is a big demon who eats a lot and sleeps very deeply. To be woken up, musicians need to play loud instrument and an elephant to shake the bed (reg. 1. a.). He joins the battle (reg. 1. b.). Rama and Laxmana eventually defeats him and Kumbhakarna dies (reg. 2). Ravana is furious and sad, he fights back and the war continues. After several failed attempts, Rama eventually defeats Ravana and the king of Lanka dies (reg. 3). Ravana's brother and nephew perform the king's last rites (reg. 5.a.). Sita is finally released and goes with Hanuman to meet Rama (reg. 5. b.). Rama doubts Sita's purity and asks her to pass the test of fire. Sita enters the fire and comes back unscathed (reg. 6). Rama takes her back (reg. 7. a.). Everyone now goes back to Ayodhya on a chariot called Pushpak (reg. 7. b.). Rama and Sita are reconciled and happy back to Ayodhya. Monkeys and other important characters of the story are present at the court (reg. 4 central).

4. Style and space

The Ram Katha museum in Ayodhya is a small provincial museum. The main exhibition space is a two storey concrete building with low ceilings and no ornamentation of any sort. The entrance of the complex however consists of a large corridor that opens to the several different parts of the building, including a courtyard, offices and a library. Each floor is divided into two walls, an outer and inner one where the exhibits are displayed, creating this way a corridor in the middle where the visitors may circulate to appreciate the exhibits on both sides. The visitors walk in between the two rows of object in a circle around the museum as they would in a temple, and as it is fairly common to see in other Indian museums too. The lower floor contains cases for tridimensional objects under glass such as terracotta and stone remains while the upper floor hangs various photographs and paintings. Because the overall space of the museum is small, there are not many exhibits and not many big objects apart from a few temple sculptures.

The Cheriyal panels have been exhibited in a space equivalent to half of the inner wall of the second floor, which I assumed would approximately be one tenth of the museum space hence it is a significantly big commission. The painting set is divided into ten panels, each measuring 76 x 101 cm. that conveniently fit the short walls of the museum too. The Ramayana is a long Epic and requires the depiction of many various episodes. This consideration influences the format and style of each panel, the organisation of the pictorial space as well as the amount of episodes depicted in each of them.

As other Cheriyal paintings would be, each panel is divided into registers and then into scenes. The division here is rather strict and each panel is divided into an equal amount of eight registers with the exception of the first and the last two panels where several registers have been merged for the purpose of a single scene. The proportions are however respected and these scenes strictly take the space of the registers they replace. Most of the scenes inside each register are either sequential or continuous. The battles may be referred to as narrative network. In the event of the scenes being clearly divided, this is made possible with the inclusion of a border or with the help of architectural elements. Each panel is framed into a non-decorated red border, not decorated. As in Madhu's painting of Venkateswara's story, hand gestures are important but in this composition, figures are more proportionate.

The background is red; the colours used for the figures are mostly yellow and green, with shades of maroon, white and pink. Rama is depicted in blue throughout as well as a few animals. Waterscapes are white, stones and rocks are grey, elements of nature but also demons and monkeys are green. Characters have been stylised to recognise Rama in blue with an arch as per the convention. Sita has been given a green saree and garlands in her hair. Ravana is multi-headed. As for the demons, they all have the same faces with much bigger eyes and the mouth opened.

The overall style is that of 'miniature' and each register is no more than 12 cm wide and each figure no more than 10 cm. Because of this small size, the painting is hardly looked at in detail within the space of the museum and it is an overall view that the visitors experience. It may be rather easy to recognise major episodes but the minor ones will remain unnoticed. As I explained in Chapter 4, the miniature style is widely recognised in India as one of the finest style of paintings and Cheriyal painters take

great pride in their capacity to painting their lengthy narratives on a very small scale. Here however, the overall look of the painting is not very fine.

Vaikuntam usually is more comfortable working on a bigger scale and he can achieve great subtlety for the figures if given a bigger format. What he achieved however is to maintain a balance between the registers and the narrative in this painting, as well as within the space of each panel. The quality of this painting resides in the capacity to fit the selected episodes of the Ramayana into a balance set of panels, each equally divided, giving overall a feeling of homogeneity and harmony. In the last two panels where a lot of battle scenes take place, he shows his mastery of the space division in allowing the characters to step out of their given registers as well as a feeling of rotation of the characters in the centre of the painting. These compositional tools convey the feeling of the battle and highlight Vaikuntam's capacity to play with the painting composition depending on the need of the narrative. This compositional mastery is something very important and acquired through the painting on scroll of lengthy and complex narratives and particularly seen in Vaikuntam's paintings as in opposition with Madhu who is a painter of details instead.

5. *A Ramayana visual culture*

As I was researching this particular commission, and probably influenced by Richman's *Many Ramayanas,* several questions came to my mind about the actual version of the narrative painted on the set. I anticipated elements of Vaikuntam's cultural capital to be reflected in the narrative, or elements of the Ramayana as depicted for the storytellers of the Mudiraj castes of fruit gatherers and farmers; perhaps too, some South Indian biases as in opposition to the North Indian version of the Epic. As I enquired about the process of acquisition of the painting, I understood that the politics behind this painting were located somewhere else.

The museum did not exactly commission the set of paintings to Cheriyal artists directly, neither did they visit the painters and picked the set according to their intention. Instead, they used the mediation of the Lepakshi Emporium outlet in Delhi. The curator of the museum Avinash Kumar, regularly travels to the Rajiv Gandhi Handicrafts Bhawan in Connaught place in Delhi in order to acquire new artefacts that relate to the Ram Katha (story). The Rajiv Gandhi Handicrafts Bhawan in Delhi is a place where handicrafts

emporia from different states in India are gathered together. The visitors can find in one place crafts and handlooms from all over the country. The Lepakshi Emporium from Andhra Pradesh which I presented in the Chapter 4 and that sells Cheriyal painting has an outlet in the Bhawan. This is where Avinash travelled and found the Ramayana set that is now displayed in the museum in Ayodhya.

Avinash explained that he regularly visits emporia in India and especially the Bhawan in Delhi, in search of new objects to display in the museum. He mentioned that the objects could be anything in relation to Rama and that could be easily displayed in the museum. He did not share this with me but I assume the choice of going to emporia may be for several reasons. The first one is linked to the rather small size of the museum that can only accommodate average size or small objects. This is best answered by the crafts emporia that usually sell objects that tourist can easily bring back to their homes. The first motivation may therefore be material and come from the physical constraints of the museum and its correspondence with the emporium's objects. In addition, one may want to consider the possible limited funds of the small provincial museum. The other two reasons I would like to propose are more political and relate to the subject of the museum directly, which is Rama and the purpose of the collection, which is to historicise the myth of his life as told in the Ramayana. In order to understand this, it is important to first recollect a few elements of the political history of Ayodhya.

6. *Ramjanmabhumi* and the politics of acquisition at the Ram Katha Museum

In the 1980s and 1990s, Ayodhya had been a place of intense communal violence in India around a controversy known as the 'Ramjanmabhumi'. The conflict resided in a disagreement over a religious site, then a mosque but said to have been built at the place of Rama's birth. In 1992, the sixteenth century mosque known as the Babri Masjid was destroyed by Hindu fundamentalists in order to re-appropriate the site. In fact, the conflict is much more complex and dates back to earlier communal violence that took place around similar religious disagreement over sacred sites in Ayodhya in the mid nineteenth century.

Tapati Guha Thakurta's chapter *Archaeology and the Monument: On two Contentious Sites of Faith and History* summarizes the history of the conflict that led to the

destruction of the mosque in greater detail.[10] Her chapter on the subject is particularly interesting as it looks at the role of archaeology and history as academic disciplines in the conflict. As the dispute was going on in court, archaeologists and historians from both sides called for archaeological evidences to support or counter the case of a temple and more broadly a Hindu religious shrine under the mosque. Guha-Thakurta denounces the misuse of these evidences to corroborate mythological fact about the life of Rama and therefore the misuse of archaeology as a discipline to ironically support certain religious beliefs.

This is particularly interesting with regards to the collections of the Ram Katha museum. Most of the ground floor of the museum is filled with findings under the form of terracotta or stone idols from the place of Rama's life, the *janmabhumi*. Like in any archaeological museum, the findings are labelled, dated, and located from the *janmabhumi* (birthplace). One such label would be "Evidences from Rama' birthplace in Ayodhya, (disputed campus), retrieved during levelling."[11] Of course, there is absolutely no reason to believe these findings are in fact retrieved evidence from Rama's birthplace but they were found on the site of the Babri Masjid and everything is attempted to make us believe so. In this regards, Guha-Thakurta elaborates on the archaeological methods that were used at the site during the dispute. She reports the inaccurate combination of excavation methods with the absence of stratigraphic research on the site, bringing to light evidences without context.[12] We may want to see a similar intention at the Ram Katha museum where findings, labelling, locating and dating do not sustain in any case the possibility of cohesive evidence. Archaeology has not only been used to assert one or the other side of the debate over the site but it is now used to confirm and validate the final decision to raze the mosque, perpetuating the belief that the place was the rightful site of Rama's birth by providing people with excavation findings.

The chronology of the museum's foundation in relation to the conflict reinforces this idea. In 1986, the government ordered that the contested site be opened for worship after it had been locked since 1949. In the same year, the research institute inside named

[10] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. "Archaeology and the monument: On two contentious sites of History." In *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, 268-304. Columbia University Press, 2004.
[11] Transcribe from Hindi "Puravshesh- Ram janmabhoomi, Ayodhya. (Vivadit parisar) Samtalikaran ke dauran prapt" Label attached to small terracotta.
[12] Guha-Thakurta, "Archaeology and the monument: On two contentious sites of History," 276.

Ayodhya Shodh Sansthan opened inside the Tulsi Smarak Bhawan. In 1992 the Babri masjid was destroyed and four years later in 1996, the Ram Katha Sangrahalaya museum opened.

Apart from archaeological evidence, the museum works towards illustrating the Ramayana as the story of Rama with various different visual tradition including pattachitras from Orissa, kalamkaris from Andhra Pradesh, and Cheriyal paintings. Finally, the museum attempts to document the life of Rama to historicising his journey across India. This is made possible through a photographic documentary matching a map of India and where every place that Rama has visited is crossed and illustrated with the photograph of a shrine dedicated to him. All labels and explanation throughout the museums are in Hindi and the target population clearly is local Hindi speakers.

Going back to the reasons for choosing a Cheriyal painting set from the Lepakshi Emporium in Delhi, it is evident that the quality of the painting was not a priority matter. Instead, the subject of the painting, as well as its relation to other exhibits in the museum seems more of a concern. For a very small provincial museum, the Ram Katha museum provides a great variety of different visual translations of the Ramayana or elements of it. Objects have been collected from everywhere in India like kalamkaris and puppets from Andhra Pradesh and the Karnataka, masks from Kerala, Tanjore paintings from Tamil Nadu and dolls from Varanasi. The museum goes as far as having commissioned a mural from Madhubani painters for the corridor right after the entrance. Artefacts from Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia, places where the Ramayana spread, complement indigenous objects as well.

These objects are mostly contemporary and have been collected from emporia in the last twenty years, since the inception of the museum. At that time, these folk art forms had already been engaged in their revival through the handicraft market for quite as it were the case with Cheriyal painting. As I explained in this regard, this process of institutionalisation through the handicraft market homogenised aspects of Indian visual cultures and the Ramayana became a common subject to each of these vernacular art forms. This made it easier then, for a museum dedicated to the story of Rama, to find different traditions, different ‘versions’ of the story across Indian folklore, understood as crafts. In the context of religious conflicts in Ayodhya, what better than the local folklore to reinforce one’s cultural appurtenance? Folk art forms are the root of one’s

country. In choosing these various local art forms from all over India, the Ram Katha museum proposed various testimonies of the Ramayana's wide presence in the country. This museological bias works as a proof that the Ramayana is an important - and probably as close to the truth as it can be- Epic to worship; so that even the most regional art practices has its own version. This recalls the idea of "Many Ramayanas" as proposed by Paula Richman. Across two publications on the subject of the Ramayana, she first establishes the variety of the Epic and the possibility of constant retelling without an actual original.[13] More interestingly the authors of *Questioning Ramayana* assume the multiplicity of the Epics and further questions its motives across time and locations.[14]

In the introduction of the same book, Romila Thapar makes an interesting remark about the Ramayana story: "The recent attempt in the politics of Hindu nationalism to homogenize the story and present a single version is antithetical to the tradition of how the story was perceived in Indian culture."[15] As we understood through the case of Cheriyal painting, the homogenisation of Hindu iconography as Rama / Krishna and more broadly Vaishnavite subjects; but within this iconography (Ramayana) there is a further homogenisation of the tale to reach the consensus of an original. That original would then carry National and homogeneous Hindu values to all. If we return to the Ram Katha museum and its multiple traditions of depicting the Ramayana, it is not the narrative and its 'originality' that the museum proposes but instead, the capacity of the story to be inclusive of all traditions. The authenticity of Rama's story is played out through its variety rather than its fitness to a constructed original. The idea in this museum is not actually to insist on one version of the story but on bringing awareness of the Ramayana's wide acceptance throughout the country, including places as remote as Cheriyal in Telangana. The artefacts from the Thai, Cambodian and Indonesian Ramayana exhibited alongside other local artefacts elaborate further on the far reaching and inclusive qualities of the Ramayana. Going back to the process of acquisition of the museums artefacts, what better place that crafts emporia could provide at the same time multiplicity, authenticity, and contemporaneity, the three requisites for the museum to support the historicity of Rama.

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[13] Richman Paula. "Introduction" *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, edited by Richman, 1991, 3-21.
[14] Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, 2001.
[15] Thapar Romila. "Foreword" in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, edited by Richman, 2001. x.

7. Conclusion

The museum used its authority as an educational institution to document and historicise the life of Rama and to further validate the religious conflicts that took place in the region. The presence of Cheriyal painting in this context supports the position of the Ramayana as an authoritative – and 'true' – text for Hindus but also for Indians, translated across the country in different media. Pictorial and artistic matters are secondary, apart maybe from its possibility to impress the visitors. Ayodhya is a small town with a heavy history and the setup of a museum here is not by chance. It is the authority of the museum that is at play but also the authenticity of the artefact it exhibits. This authenticity is acquired by a series of elements such as the multiplicity of the Ramayana but more importantly by the choice of 'authentic' representatives of India's rooted traditions, picked and marketed by the handicrafts emporia.

2. Questioning the limits of Cheriyal paintings

In the following section, I chose two instances of Cheriyal paintings commissioned by private individuals that expand further the definition of the tradition. As with the Sri Venkateswara College and the Ram Katha paintings, the iconography of these paintings experienced significant changes; but unlike the previous examples, the support, medium and style, too, underwent important modifications with these private orders. I consider these as the most particularised versions of Cheriyal paintings with which only the painter maintains a connection. As in the previous section, I look at these two commissions from where they were initiated and in their function and describe their materiality accordingly.

a. The Legend of Ponnivala

In 2009-10, Nageshwar trained a man named Ravichandran Arumugam to the Cheriyal style of painting at a workshop at DakshinaChitra in Chennai. Ravichandran is Brenda Beck's assistant and was asked to learn the Cheriyal folk style in order to work on an

animation project for the legend of Ponnivala. The legend of Ponnivala is the name Brenda Beck gave to the *Annanmar Kathai* (The elder brothers' story), a folk story from the Kongu Nadu region in the North West of Tamil Nadu. Brenda Beck recorded and researched about the tale extensively which resulted in a digitalisation of the entire legend, now available online.[16] The work that Brenda commissioned from Nageshwar and his family and their cooperation with Ravichandran is at the root of what one now sees online. It is a complex commission that deserves an understanding of the different steps that led to the production of the Ponnivala episodes. It also involves two distinct folk traditions, both related to storytelling and oral tradition in different ways and both meeting for the purpose of a digital project of storytelling. I would like to explain these complexities and insist on the progression from the Cheriyal style of depiction to the digital telling of a Tamil tale. In addition, Brenda Beck commissioned a scroll of the Ponnivala tale from Nageshwar. Identifying each episode was unfortunately not part of the project of this thesis but I introduce it in conclusion nevertheless.

1. *The commission*

In order to transpose the oral and theatrical narrative of the Ponnivala tale onto a two-dimensional format, Brenda Beck had to go through several steps. The following information is taken from an interview I conducted with her by email in July 2014. Before Brenda turned to Nageshwar for helping Ravichandran with the drawings of the digital Ponnivala, she had been searching for the most appropriate visual translation of the tale. She explained that the *Annanmar Kathai* was only performed as storytelling without using props and that the region's visual tradition had mostly terracotta figurines. She therefore decided to turn to Deborah Thiagarajan, the CEO of the Madras Crafts Foundation and its centre DakshinaChitra, that was discussed in the previous chapter. There, she thought she could find a folk tradition from South India to fit best her project. Deborah Thiagarajan told her about the Cheriyal artists and Beck sent her assistant artist Ravichandran to learn from Nageshwar at DakshinaChitra itself. Following the time at DakshinaChitra, Ravichandran and Nageshwar met once more in Cheriyal and later in Delhi.[17]

When I interviewed Brenda Beck, she insisted on saying that the Cheriyal artists did not directly work on the thirteen hours video series but instead, trained Ravichandran in

[16] The Legend of Ponnivala webpage http://www.ponnivala.com/
[17] 21/07/2014 Email interview with Brenda Beck

their style.[18] They also provided painting on cloth with several isolated motifs such as trees, landscapes elements, houses, to be used in the digitalisation project that Ravichandran himself conducted. She also explained that Ravichandran took inspiration and reworked on the samples Nageshwar provided to compose the animation himself. She mentioned their significantly different styles.[19]

Nageshwar's son Sai Kiran showed great enthusiasm for the digitalisation of Cheriyal images; though he and his father never really got to experiment with that technique. Their role was limited to providing the draft images and motifs to be used for the animation. Modification of any sorts was only possible with the digital version of the figures, which was Ravichandran's task. The video credit roll of the animation mentions Nageshwar, his assistant wife Padma, and his brother Venkaramana as the lead artist but for Brenda, Ravichandran was by far the lead artist of the project.[20] To complete his part of the project, Nageshwar was given a series of notes upon which he created his own characters, colours and composition, and then used for the digital project. As I discussed this commission once with Sai Kiran, he mentioned the work on five hundred characters in addition to architectural elements, trees and other motifs for the animation.[21]

Because of each of the protagonist's bias, it is impossible to find the original contribution of each artist. Brenda Beck clearly favours her own artist Ravichandran. Nageshwar does not exactly know the extent of his intervention in the project. As for Ravichandran, he considered Nageshwar his master and will not accept to take credit for his own innovation. Perhaps this question of the artist is irrelevant here as it is the case more often than not for the Cheriyal painters. What we can do instead is observe few screenshots of the video and observe the depiction of characters, architectural elements as well as landscape to see how the Cheriyal style was adapted to the animation and what reasons made this exchange appropriate to the project.

[18] 21/07/2014 Anais: "How did the commission take place? When? Where? Who was involved?" Brenda: "The Andhra-based Cherial artists DID NOT work directly on the 13 hours of animation used for the Ponnivala video series. Rather, the artist I commissioned […]went […] at Dakshinchita to study with a Cherial artist. He always cites D. Nageshwar as his "guru" but I would say that his art is significantly different in style from Nageshwar's."
[19] Ibid. Brenda: "He always cites D. Nageshwar as his "guru" but I would say that his art is significantly different in style from Nageshwar's."
[20] Ibid. Brenda: "We have given D. Nageshwar the lead credit on the credit roll for all our videos…. at Ravichandran Arumugam's request. […] Again this hierarchy references Ravi's sense of correctness…. But (honestly) Ravi himself was far and away the lead artist for the work."
[21] 10/07/2014 Discussion with Sai Kiran

2. Summary of the Ponnivala tale

The Ponnivala story as Brenda Beck recorded in 1965 is an 18 evenings' long performance. As I do not intend to work on the narrative *per se*, I opted for a summary of the story on the basis of Beck's own summary available on the website of *The Legend of Ponnivala.*[22] Like for many Hindu narratives, there are several 'sub-stories' attached to the main storyline that justify the several curses or the rebirth of certain characters into the present situation. I have omitted these here as I only wish to offer a general idea of the plot.

The story begins with Parvati creating nine brothers, all farmers, and their wives, to cultivate the land of Vellivala. As famine strikes, one of the brothers Kolatta is forced to find work in the land of Ponnivala, offered by the local Chola king. Crops in the land of Ponnivala are prosperous until another famine strikes, this time in the nearby land of the Chola king. The king's cows then wander to Ponnivala in search for food and damage Kotalla's crops. Thinking that the crops have been damaged by wild animals, Kolatta builds a spiked fence that unwillingly kills the hungry cows. As a punishment for killing the cows, Shiva utters the curse that the Ponnivala family would not bear children for seven generations; but Vishnu interferes and grants Kolatta a son named Kunnutaiya. The boy soon loses his parents and is raised by Kolatta's jealous brothers. As the brothers want the land of Ponnivala to themselves, they try to kill the boy who is forced in to exile and works as a shepherd. As he grows, he returns to Ponnivala and finds his family palace destroyed. The Chola king grants him land and the family starts rebuilding. Because of competition with the clansmen of the village, Kunnutaiya's seeds do not sprout and Vishnu interferes again to stimulate the crops. Kunnutiya's harvest is prosperous and he regains the status that he had previously lost. Because of Shiva's earlier curse, Kunnutiya and his wife were not given a child. They decide to undertake a long pilgrimage to the gates of heaven with the intention of pleading with Shiva to release them from the curse. At Shiva's council, Kunnutiya's wife Tamarai is granted three children, two boys and one girl named Tangal. Another child is also granted to Tamarai's servant. When the boys come to age of marrying, they choose the path of the warriors' life and concentrate on fighting. A great battle starts between the forest dwellers and the farmers of Ponnivala for which the two brothers fight intensely. The battle was entirely created by Vishnu so that the boys would die and be taken back to

[22] The legend of Ponnivala webpage http://www.ponnivala.com/

Shiva. The two sons and the servant's son die. The sister Tangal, revives her brothers' bodies but then understands that all must return to Shiva. She performs the funeral rites for her brothers and is then taken up to heaven herself. The story ends.

3. *"The Legend of Ponnivala" animation*

In order to offer comparison between the animation and the Cheriyal style of painting, I chose to take screenshots of the online videos for *The Legend of Ponnivala*. The Ponnivala tale was released in 26 episodes available online, in dvds, and as a graphic novel. The graphic novel was created from frames extracted from the digital animation. The connection between the genre of the graphic novel and the Cheriyal paintings is something I have been approaching as I discussed the narrative features of the paintings, their division into registers and into scenes, and framed by borders. Both share narrative principles that separate the entire space into registers, themselves divided into separate scenes through several visual devices suggesting temporality, disruption and ubiquity. The *Legend of Ponnivala* has transposed these narrative devices and pasted them together to create an animation. A black screen in the video replaces the borders that divide the scenes and creates temporality on the scroll or the graphic novel. The motion of the video also replaced the simultaneous scene taking place in the same space, often seen in the Cheriyal scroll paintings.

The animation is not naturalistic and does not intend to be. The video sets in motion highly stylised figures and animals as they have been sketched on paper board. The figures move their limbs like puppets in straight gestures. The Cheriyal folk style of depiction too demonstrates such non-naturalistic depiction and has been using the same device in its scrolls. The stylised and puppet like representation of the characters and objects is also something one finds in the scroll.

The first and most striking similarity between the animation and the Cheriyal style is in the depiction of figures (Fig. 7. 18 and 7. 19). Both represent the characters in profile view, with rare instances of frontal depiction for deities and demons in the Cheriyal tradition, in addition to Kings in *Ponnivala*. The figures are drawn in a similar manner as well, in the same proportions and circled with a black line. The faces are square and the design of hands and feet is similar too. The big black and white eyes are on the side and sketched in three lines in both representations. Moustaches are alike too, thick and

wavy. Costumes resemble too; women wear the saree with a *pallu* (headpiece) on the left shoulder, the men wear dhotis and a *dupatta*. Perhaps the most striking analogy between the Cheriyal painting and the animation is in the depiction of ornaments such as towering crown with gem inlaid (Fig. 7. 18 and 7. 20). Architectural elements show great similarities as well and most of the open-air architectural spaces in which the story takes place may be found in Cheriyal paintings too (Fig. 7. 21, 7. 22 and 7. 23). Temples are alike; the perspective is rather clumsy and follows a single central vanishing point. The golden decoration on the top of these architectures is heavy and accentuated with the black lines.

Differences however, can be seen in the landscape. The animation offers a wide range of tree and forests as well as crops and fields which I have never encountered in any of the Cheriyal paintings (Fig. 7. 24). The original function of Cheriyal painting never necessitated a special attention to the natural elements whereas the *Annanmar Kathai* is essentially a tale of agriculture and land. The animation project definitely worked extensively on these features and produced a lavishly green and original set of landscape as a setup for the narrative.

Overall, colours are similar, mixing at the same time the bold yellow, blue and green with the more nuanced brown and shades of pink for the skin tones. The latter is more various in the animation than in Cheriyal paintings. The Cheriyal figures and motives have been made more naturalistic with the inclusion of shades although the overall animation does not search for a naturalistic rendering of the animation. The differences between both styles are minor and may only be seen for someone accustomed to the paintings. The set in motion however gives a totally different flavour to the usually stiff motifs of Cheriyal painting.

4. Folklore exchange

In both Cheriyal paintings and the Ponnivala animation, deities are painted in bright blue, with heavy yellow jewellery and ornaments (Fig. 7. 18 and 7. 20). In the animation, the deity travels in the sky, resting on Shesha. This depiction of Vishnu relying on Shesha can be found in numerous Cheriyal painting and continuously from the older scroll until the present-day emporium pieces. This particular element is

important to draw connections between the past and the present of Cheriyal painting and now further into the Tamil folklore.

In fact, the story does not end in the Tamil folklore. The Ponnivala project is a Canadian production, first launched in English and Tamil for North Americans. A French dubbed version is in preparation too. *The Legend of Ponnivala* is revived for the important Tamil diaspora of North America. Tamil folklore then takes the form of home culture and forgotten heritage. Children, who constitutes most of the audience of the animation may not speak Tamil any more or maybe more familiar with English. The story is available through 26 episodes divided into two seasons.

According to Beck, there is no longer any storyteller capable of singing the forty four hours long tale in Tamil Nadu. Her project served to revive at the same time an oral tale that was to disappear and record it in a different format, serving as an archive of this disappearing tale. Apart from this, Beck's project also permitted a shift form an oral to a visual narrative. To do so, she called Telangana visual culture and created her visual archive of Tamil folklore through the cultural capital of another region of India. Besides, she complied with the selective nature of a visual narrative. Only certain episodes, aspects or elements of the whole story can be translated visually, which is similiar to the Cheriyal scroll for performances. Finally, in using the Cheriyal painting style to transpose this narrative onto a two dimensional support, it is Telangana folklore that is been reused and revived as well. With regards to the Cheriyal tradition however, only motifs were reused and totally devoid of any reference to their original function.

Before I conclude, I would like draw attention to the movement of folklore in India, permitted through shifts in patronage. Reviving folklore has always been a concern in the preservation of oral tradition, oral literature, and dying art practices. Beck initiated her own journey to revive the *Annanmar Kathai* tale from Tamil Nadu where it originated. The *Annanmar Kathai* was an oral narrative performed for long hours by storytellers but the performance does not exist anymore. Likewise, the Cheriyal scrolls that were used in the storytelling of local caste, are almost no longer performed. In spite of the major difference in the tale, both have been recorded, on tape or in museums and both have been readapted, online or on store shelves.

As she was working on the digitisation of the story, Beck thought of commissioning a scroll of the Ponnivala story from Nageshwar, in the style of Cheriyal scrolls for performances (Fig. 25). The scroll is 7.30 meters length divided into forty one registers. Apart from the bright red that turned into a more earthen shade of brown, and of course the narrative, the scroll is identical to those found in the communities of Telangana. The narratives are different but if the Ponnivala does not talk about the legitimisation of professions such as weaving or cow herding, it brings up another very important part of Indian social structure, that of disputes over land ownership. Both call for the interventions of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu to help, but also to justify whatever happens at the end of the story, through a series of inside mythological stories. Both are placed into vague historical periods as well, the Yadavas of the Kakatiya dynasties for the Katam Raju story that we talked about in Chapter 4, and the Chola kings of Tamil Nadu for the Ponnivala. In this example more than any others I presented, it is not only about adapting Cheriyal painting to another tradition but about offering a dying tradition a suitable place to take rebirth.

b. **Shrinathji in Hyderabad**

In June 2014, Sai Kiran Nakash delivered a painting of Shrinathji to Satish Shah, a gem dealer of Hyderabad. The painting is a watercolour on canvas and measures 75 x 105 cm (Fig. 26). Among all the paintings we have seen so far, this painting is the first one to clearly break away from the narrative dimension of Cheriyal painting, transforming it into not only into a single scene image as we have seen with the paintings for the market, but into the depiction of an icon. In the following description, I would like to comment on the style of the painting, with regards to Cheriyal painting as we know them so far, but also in relation to what it imitates here, the painting of Shrinathji as seen in Nathdvara (Fig. 7. 27).[23] These two important pictorial traditions merge into this painting and translate the patron's intention which I explain as well. The information gathered about this particular commission comes from an informal interview I conducted with Satish Shah in late April 2015 at his home in Hyderabad and from a casual discussion with Sai Kiran earlier in July 2014. [24]

[23] Williams, Joanna et al. *Kingdom of the Sun: Indian Court and Village Art From the Princely State of Mewar*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2007, 190.
[24] Discussion with Satish Shah 29/04/2015, Discussion with Sai Kiran Nakash 10/07/2014

5. The patron and its commission

The patron of this painting is an important dealer and the founder of the Deccan Institute of Gem and Jewellery in Hyderabad. His ancestors have always been affluent jewellers and bankers from the merchant community known in India as *Modh Baniya*.[25] They are Pushtimarg followers and worship Krishna as Shrinathji for which they regularly visit Krishna's home in Nathdvara, the main pilgrimage centre of the sect.

Nathdvara is a small town in Rajasthan near Udaipur. For the members of the Pushtimarg, Krishna is worshipped as a 'live' deity and like his worshippers, he is engaged into daily and yearly activities.[26] For this reason, Krishna does not have a temple at Nathdvara but resides in a *haveli* (mansion). The *haveli* runs according to Krishna's daily and yearly activities, which determines the way he is adorned and presented for *darshan* (worship through exchange of gaze) as well as the paintings that decorate his home. Because of the importance of painting for the Pushtimarg, Nathvara is also the most vibrant centre of Shrinathji paintings.

The most popular paintings that decorate Krishna's home are *pichwai* (hanging), decorated with the various forms of Krishna as Shrinathji and his activities. Because every home of a Pushtimarg worships Shrinathji as a 'living' deity, each of these religious activities is reproduced in private worship too, as it is in Nathdvara. For this reason, the Pushtimarg are important patron of *pichwai* and any other art form that may enhance their devotion to Shrinathji. If I cannot develop further on the Pushtimarg and Nathdvara paintings I would like to draw attention however, on the importance of art patronage within the Pushtimarg communities, as part of their private religious practice but also for donations to other Shrinathji's residences.

Originally from Gujarat, Satish Shah and his family speak Gujarati along with Telugu and Urdu / Hindi; but because Shah's ancestors settled in the Deccan in the early eighteenth century, they consider themselves "Deccanis."[27] Because of their origin and

[25] Anita B. Shah "Devotion and Patronage: The Story of a Pushtimarg Family," in *Gates of the Lord: The Tradition of Krishna Paintings* edited by Madhuvanti Ghose, Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2015, 43.
[26] Ambalal, Amit. *Krishna As Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings From Nathdvara.* Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1987. 21-36.
[27] 29/04/2015 Satish Shah said "we are from the Deccan" as their origin and not from Hyderabad or from South India.

religious affiliation, the Shah family is very closely related to western Indian cultural practices but their presence in the Deccan for the last three hundred years has made them very well aware of the cultural capital of the region. Over the years, Shah and his ancestors have been active commissioners of art work from the Deccan region. In *Gates of the Lords: The Tradition of Krishna Paintings*, Anita Shah delivers important information about Shah's family lineage – to which she also belongs - and especially about their origin and their continuous active art patronage in the Deccan.[28]

Among the many artworks they commissioned from various local artists, they were particularly interested in kalamkari from Masulipatnam in coastal Andhra Pradesh, where textile business brought some of the family members to the town.[29] They also commissioned numerous *pichwais* that depicts episodes of the life of Krishna as followed by the Pushtimarg. The Calico museum in Ahmedabad and the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal museum have few of these *pichwais* in their collection.[30] Apart from these, the family also donated art work to the Pushtimarg temple in Nathdvara, but also in Varanasi or in their own family shrines.[31] These Deccani *pichwais* are particularly interesting for their use of gold and silver leaf that identifies and differentiates them from others from Western India for instance.[32] The commission of a Cheriyal painting of Shrinathji to Sai Kiran takes place in this dynamic cultural context and vivid patronage environment.

Sai Kiran is a young artist who just completed his fine arts training from Hyderabad. He now lives in Hyderabad but he grew up in Cheriyal where he learnt painting from his father Nageshwar. He regularly visits Cheriyal and helps the other family members in completing commissions for the performance scrolls. Additionally, he teaches fine arts to young children, actively produces paintings for the Lepakshi emporia, conducts workshops on the Cheriyal painting tradition, and answers several private commissions such as Shah's. Satish Shah and Sai Kiran met for the first time at one of the workshop I introduced in Chapter 5, organised by Nagesh Rao at 'Our Sacred Space.' Sai Kiran is a good Cheriyal painter with a confident line and fine drawing abilities. He experiments on other supports and with other mediums too. Shah did not attend the workshop

[28] Shah "Devotion and Patronage: The Story of a Pushtimarg Family," 42-53.
[29] Ibid., 50.
[30] Shah "Devotion and Patronage: The Story of a Pushtimarg Family," 42-53.
[31] Ibid., 49.
[32] Ibid.

because of a general interest in handicrafts or in the making process as 'Our Sacred Space' promotes, but because he is interested in local art forms and their artists to commission work for his community. As we discussed the commission, Shah explained that he wanted a painting made by local folk artists. He added that he did not want a particularly fine painting but something deeply localised above all. For this reason, he gave only few indications about the format and iconography and let the choice of colours and style opened to Sai Kiran. The only requisite was the depiction of Shrinathji.[33]

6. *Description of the painting*

In this painting, Krishna is depicted as Shrinathji, the seven years old living deity of Nathdvara and the object of devotion of the Pushtimarg Vaishnavite sect.[34] Amit Ambalal gives detailed information on the Pushtimarg sect as well as on the iconography of the deity depending on the various forms in which he is worshipped.[35] His reference is important to understand the iconography of the Shrinathji painting as depicted by Sai Kiran.

Here, Krishna is depicted in black, standing in frontal view with his feet symmetrically opened in *sadapadma*. His eyes are looking downwards "casting grace, *pushti,* on those who seek refuge at his feet."[36] His right hand is at the hip and his left hand lifted towards the sky. This gesture represents an element of Krishna's mythology where the deity lifts the Mount Govardhana to protect the inhabitants of Vraj from Indra's storms. Shrinathji is richly ornamented with golden jewellery, a garland around his neck, bracelets all over his arms, heavy necklaces with complex designs, earrings, nose ring, anklets, and a crown. In his right hand, he holds a lotus flower as the symbol of Radha's heart kept next to his, and the flute. The back of his head is crowned with a peacock feather and on his forehead he wears a *tilaka* which represents the mark of Radha's footprint as he bowed to her. At his feet in front of him, there is a golden pan box and a red jar. The pan box in front of him contains the twelve pans that symbolise the twelve

[33] 29/04/2015 Anais: "Who chose the technique? Did you provide any guidance?" Shah: "I let the painter free, with little guidance. […] I preferred to let him be free so that it testifies of the style and experience of the painter."
[34] Ambalal. *Krishna As Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings From Nathdvara.* 49.
[35] Ambalal. *Krishna As Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings From Nathdvara.*
[36] Ibid., 53

bowers where Krishna danced with his *gopis* (milkmaid). The pitcher of water wrapped in the red cloth is a symbol of Krishna's mother Yashoda's and her love and devotion for the child. In this painting, Shrinathji wears a lower garment and nothing on the top apart from the jewellery and a *dupatta* (scarf). The dress is made of three different pieces of fabric, a yellow one from the waist and around the feet, a blue one as the larger panel of the dress and a red one underneath. The background of the painting is pink; the ground on which Krishna is standing is an ochre tiled floor in perspective.

Shrinathji's posture, mudras, and attributes carefully follow those as depicted in the Shrinathji images in Nathdvara (Fig. 7. 27). These symbols are very important for the depiction of the deity as per the Pushtimarg worship as they translate the mood of the deity which is the foremost form of identification with the deity performed by the devotees. This justifies the fixed depiction of certain motifs in the painting like the downward looking gaze for instance. As long as these elements have been respected, there are however, few areas where the painter may interfere with his own style which is what I would like to look at now.

The first one is the choice of colours for this painting. Overall, the majority of the colours chosen in this painting is yellow, red and green and one big portion of blue for the lower part of Shrinathji's dress. These colours are the typical primary and secondary colours used in the Cheriyal painting that we have seen throughout. The only exception is in the use of black for the deity's skin and the pastel shades of pink and ochre for the background and the floor. If we now zoom on to the dress, the garment is divided into three sections, each of different colours and decorated with a different pattern. Cheriyal painters are familiar with the variety of textile patterns, especially when they paint scrolls for the Padmasali, the weavers' community which I introduced in Chapter 4. There, a lot of small textile patterns are painted on different colours to represent the variety of fabrics that the weaving community interacts with. Shirnathij's dress echoes this depiction of textile patterns of Cheriyal paintings. Similarly, the jewellery reflects the usual colouring seen in Cheriyal paintings with yellow, red and green. In fact, the red and green gems mounted on gold (yellow) for Shrinathji's jewelleries could remind us of the borders that usually separate registers or frame the paintings in the Cheriyal style. The border that frame Shrinathji here however, is a common elaborate Cheriyal style border, with a yellow background, itself framed into a red thick line and decorated with red dots and white petals, all linked by thin flowing black lines. In comparison to

both paintings styles rom Nathdvara and Cheriyal, this painting of Shrinathji is rather minimalist and in spite of the bright colours and the dress pattern, the painting is much less crowded as one may find in these two original traditions.

7. Opinions on the commission

Satish Shah is a collector with an acute knowledge of art history and a genuine interest for techniques, materials, and the cultural value of collected or commissioned artworks. Because of his responsiveness to art historical concerns, I initiated an enquiry about his opinion on the painting and I received very clear feedback on his concerns with the painting.[37] Shah was not fully satisfied with the pictorial outcome of the commission. He explained to me that Krishna's face was sketched after the kalamkari style Shrinathji hanging that he keeps in his sitting room and which he showed Sai Kiran before he started his own adaptation. For Shah, the drawings of the face and of the eye mudra were satisfying; but the use of watercolour did not give the polish usually seen in contemporary Shrinathji images. Overall, the use of watercolour gave a flat impression that was not fully appreciated. But the real concern for Shah -which he mentioned before I even asked - was Sai Kiran's refusal to use four hundred folios of gold leaf that he had available. Shah requested Sai Kiran to make use of these folios for the Shrinathji icon but Sai Kiran refused as he did not think himself technically capable. Instead, he covered the painting with yellow watercolour, which was far from the expected result.[38] I assumed these golden folios that should have been used would have prolonged the Deccani peculiarity of using gold and silver leaves as seen in the *pichwai* from the region. In spite of this disappointment, the patron insisted several times on the most important thing to him, which was the painter's freedom to use his own style and experience in the painting; and that the pictorial discordances were minor to him. Above all, the patron definitely searched for a local commission, translating at the same time elements of his cultural capital, which he referred to as "community," and his interest for art. He also understood that Sai Kiran was a young painter and appreciated his efforts, adding that he would certainly commission again Cheriyal artists and explore further these cultural exchanges.[39]

[37] 29/04/2015. Discussion with Satish Shah
[38] 29/04/2015 Shah: "I wanted golden leaves which I had available, some 400 folios, but Sai Kiran said he couldn't do it. Instead he put yellow paint which is not really convincing"
[39] 29/04/2015. Discussion with Satish Shah

The overall look of the painting contrasts with other Shrinathji paintings and carries the Cheriyal folk flavour. Once again with this example, the Cheriyal style can be summed to few elements of style and motifs like the border, the colours, the peculiar dress pattern designs and the treatment of jewellery. However, the imposing presence of Shrinathji and the strict depiction of his attributes make it difficult not to confound the painting with one from Nathdvara. Sai Kiran was enthusiastic about the possibilities of innovation offered with this painting but the conventions for the depiction of Shrinathji are so strictly defined and codified that the 'freedom' offered to the painter seems rather limited. Sai Kiran's opinion after the delivery of this commission corroborates this idea. The young painter did not really enjoy the painting process for which he thought he was not suitable and with which he was unfamiliar.

8. Other Shrinathjis

Shah and his ancestors have been collecting art for several generations. At the time of my visit to his home for the Cheriyal painting of Shrinathji, the collector agreed to show me several pieces in his collection. Few of the artefacts he collected were not displayed inside the house, stored on the walls and on shelves of the 'visiting' room where the meeting took place. There, he pointed out a painting on the wall, a framed Tanjore style painting on wood of Krishna with Yashoda covered with golden foils. Inside the house, he showed me two paintings as well. The first one was an image of Shrinathji painted in Andhra Pradesh, on cloth using the kalamkari technique. The background of this painting was painted in the deep shades of red and the floral design so typical of the kalamkari tradition of South India.[40] Krishna was richly adorned and the combination of the *kalam* (pen) technique with the inclusion of golden foils offered a feeling of tri dimensionality on the painting. The last piece he showed me was a set of miniature paintings of the life of Krishna that he had pinned on the wall of a staircase. Each of these miniatures has captions written in *Braj* with a Persian script. The Braj language is spoken in the Mathura region where Krishna was born and until today remains vividly associated with the mystical literature of the Pushtimarg. He was particularly fascinated with this set as his grandfather had commissioned it from craftsmen in Hyderabad, familiar with the Persian script but able to adapt it to the Braj language. Each of the paintings that Shah agreed to show me was a testimony to the nature of his community,

[40] Dallapiccola. *Kalamkari Temple Hangings,* 16-7.

combining at the same time the Shrinathji worship as it is practiced in western India with the local artistic traditions of the place where the family settled centuries ago.

9. Conclusion

This painting of Shrinathji may be seen as the clash and resolution of two rooted pictorial traditions, that of the Shrinathji image and that of Cheriyal painting. The local religious narratives of Telangana have been transposed on to the imagery of the Pushtimarg, a widespread form of Hindu Vaishnavite religious practice from Western India. The Cheriyal style has been chosen by a community that has been collecting art for generations with the purpose of testifying to their plural identity and their active patronage of the arts. The patron did not express any sign of orthodoxy in his religious practice and with regards to this particular commission; but insisted instead on talking about the identity of his own community. In transposing the religious iconography of his community onto local art forms, Satish Shah records and contributes to the dissemination of a visual knowledge about his people in the Deccan region, started by his forefather generations ago. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to see the very act of patronage as a religious act in the context of the Pushtimarg. As Ambalal explains, the very commission, adornment and gift of *pichwai* among other artwork was an element of worship, manifesting and increasing the *bhava* (emotions) that is the base of Shrinathji's worshipping practice.[41] Besides, most of the followers of Pushtimarg are associated with the wealthy mercantile families of India who could afford active patronage across time, at the same time in the context of their religious practice but also as a manifestation of their never ending dislocation due to the nature of their profession. The concerns about testifying - and in a way archiving - the identity of the community brought up by Shah during our conversation, probably are those that define the community. The patronage of local art form itself is a trait of this plural identity, justified in the context of religious practices where adornment and gift are important part of the rituals.

As I introduced the paintings for performances of the caste Puranas in Chapter 3, I ventured into proposing a secular understanding of the sacred scroll because of the social and financial interdependency of the three communities that interact with it. Similarly, here, the paintings but also patronage may be seen as a religious

[41] Ambalal. *Krishna As Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings From Nathdvara.* 11-13.

manifestation of secular concerns towards recording the movements of a community that always faced interactions with other communities due to their mercantile profession. In this regards, both Cheriyal and 'Pushtimarg' paintings may be seen as archival methods in their own right, for their own community. Returning back to the commission, the Cheriyal style painting of Shrinathji has neither religious nor decorative function and will remain hanged in the 'visiting' room among other artefacts in Satish Shah's home.

3. Concluding remarks

a. Intermediaries

While each of the four examples I have presented above is highly particularised and very much connected with their patrons, they all have in common the intervention of intermediaries into the commissioning process. In the first two cases, the Lepakshi Emporium was instrumental in the commission. Arpitha Reddy had encountered Madhu's work through a calendar painting he painted for Lepakshi while the Ramayana was directly bought from the Delhi showroom of the Emporium. In the following two cases, it is the Nagesh Rao-'Our Sacred Space' association, and DakshinaChitra that came into play with their support for local South Indian folklore.

As we discussed earlier in Chapter 5 about the Lepakshi Emporium, the institution does not only increase sales of the corrupted 'Cheriyal Pata paintings,' it also offers a new dimension to the tradition through its role as intermediary; and a lot happen behind the showroom. Lepakshi materialises part of the government policies on handicrafts that come from Delhi through the various regional Development Commissioners. It is the access to craftsmen for some of the patrons and the face of some patrons for the craftsmen.

If we look at the two commissions of Shrinathji and Ponnivala, it is another set of institution that we recall here. Satish Shah met Sai Kiran at a workshop in 'Our Sacred Space' organised by Nagesh Rao the social entrepreneur I introduced in Chapter 5. As for Brenda Beck, she opted for a contact with the Madras Craft Foundation and

particularly DakshinaChitra. Nagesh Rao works only with local artisans from Hyderabad, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, mostly Cheriyal paintings, Pochampalli textile and kalamkaris while DakshinaChitra works with South Indian crafts. The patrons Satish Shah and Brenda Beck both showed great concern with the locality and the importance of the identity of that locality in their commission. Shah searched for a representative of his 'hybrid' culture and Beck for a suitable South Indian folk adaptation of a Tamil folktale. In comparison with the other previous two commissions, these are more rooted and localised into Telangana and South India and both institutions called for the purpose share the same interest.

Besides, it is worth noting that the institution that served as intermediaries in these commissions do have an impact to the materiality of these paintings as well. The Sri Venkateswara College and the Ram Katha Museum conducted their commission through Lepakshi and the output for both was the epitome of a Cheriyal painting. Apart from the format and technique, everything was just as we know Cheriyal to be with the narrative space divided into registers, the red background and contrasting colours, and the stylised figures. This was made possible through the intervention of an institution that promotes these epitomic features and that defined and validated Cheriyal as such. In contrast, Nagesh Rao and DakshinaChitra are more flexible entities that share the commercial dimension of Lepakshi but through the encouragement of the painter's individuality and the tradition's contemporaneity in mind. This results in allowing *The Legend of Ponnivala* online and a Cheriyal depiction of Shrinathji. Either way, the mediation of institutions serves to open the tradition up to new patron, which manifests into different techniques, different supports, different styles and different iconographies.

These commissions are usually challenging for the painters whether we think of Madhu using acrylic, Sai Kiran depicting the religiously 'right' Shrinathji, or Nageshwar painting a completely new narrative. If these paintings are challenging for the painters, they are challenging for Cheriyal painting as a tradition too. As we already said several times, the division of narrative space, the use of red and contrasting colours, the framed paintings are some of the common features of Cheriyal painting. Each of these commissions, however, challenges these conventions to a certain extent. The Sri Venkateswara was the most identifiably Cheriyal painting and it was rather easy to say that this is a Cheriyal painting. Similarly, with the Ramayana, in spite of the miniature dimension, the Cheriyal style was highly recognisable. Once we shift to Shrinathji, the

identity of Cheriyal is put into question and an unacquainted eye may very well believe this to be a Shrinathji painting from Nathdvara while the Ponnivala project remains attached to Cheriyal painting only through a long distance intervention of the painters into the final output uploaded online. This questions the definition of Cheriyal painting and the basis on which one may agree to this definition. Is it about its locality? Is it about its materiality, technique and pictorial rendering? Or is it actually only about its painters?

We have seen in the previous chapters that institutions offered a discourse and a visibility for these paintings that eventually allowed further promotion and an emancipation from the tradition that almost only attach it to its makers. It seemed rather logical to believe these institutions had the last word on deciding who is a Cheriyal painters and who is not. What we see however is that these private and special commissions that take place through institutions but not for them, prefers to see institutions as intermediaries rather than final destination. Because of this break between the several entities of the tradition (patrons, intermediaries and painters), it allows not only the emancipation of paintings but the emancipation of the painters too.

b. **Painters**

As I devoted most of the time of this research defining the nature of contemporary Cheriyal painting, I had decided not to make the painters the focus of the research. A problem arose however when I realised towards the end of my observations that Cheriyal paintings cannot be defined solely through their visual features. The process of institutionalisation and the development of new forms of patronage permitted transformation of the tradition to such an extent that only the painters constitute its constant framework. As we have only hinted at in the earlier chapters, the painters' position within the tradition is complex for several reasons. The ambiguous position of Madhu, the complete disregard for assistants, the application of the GI tag, the painters' training, are some of the matters that impact the production of the painting and the relation with patrons and intermediaries. With this in mind, understanding the painters' relations with their work, with their patrons and among themselves became particularly relevant and I thought I should suggest few elements for further considerations.

If we think of Lyons's research on Nathdvara painters[42] and Bundgaard's on pattachitra painters,[43] both dealt with large numbers of artisans hence with complex inter-personal relations and high competitions. The Cheriyal painting community in contrast is a small group of 12 'workers' including assistants. The smaller size of the painting community makes competition subtler and allows an easier transposition of family structure onto the working necessities. Each individual has a clearly defined role within the whole, defined through the position in the family but also depending on its training, its recognition and its pictorial abilities.

Often seen as restrictive and narrow, folk art forms tend to be associated with craftsmanship because of the repetitive nature of the motives and the apparently non-existent innovation. The consideration and status of Indian craftsmen has been approached in many various ways and a recurrent debate still opposed the same two views. On the one side, it is fairly common to believe painters of folk art are only craftsmen and reproduce as their predecessors have taught them, without any innovations. At the same time, the opposite was also true and few have tried to emphasise on the artistic elements of each individual craftsmen. Lyons very much worked towards this avenue in her approach to the Nathdvara painters and she succeeded in re-evaluating them as artists concerned with individual style, innovation, and artistic decision making. Alternatively, Bundgaard looked at the patachittra painters in relation to the increased competition after the government revival, but also in relation to their training and inter-personal interactions, therefore providing an understanding of the painter as an individual but within the community.

Bundgaard's moderate position is what I adopted here with Cheriyal painters as well. In spite of a much smaller structure than the painters of Patachittras, the Cheriyal painters too, oscillate between the simplified statuses of artists and craftsmen. At times painters adopt a convenient anonymity behind the Cheriyal idiom with all it carries (disappearing, traditional, folk, authentic, Hindu), and at times they manifest an increasing sense of individuality as patrons directly interact with them and order tailored paintings. They understand very well these identities and easily shift from one to the other depending on the situation. At times enumerating their official recognitions

[42] Lyons, *The Artists of Nathadwara: The Practice of Painting in Rajasthan*.
[43] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*.

and titles, at times sketching and passing the painting to another family member to fill in the colours, the Cheriyal painters are equally confortable in their role as artist and craftsman. For instance, it is fairly common to see the signature of the painters on the painting for a private patron, whereas none of the paintings for Lepakshi is signed. Furthermore, these two different facets of the painters' personalities once again depend on the reception of the painting. For instance, in painting a scroll for the performers, the Cheriyal painter needs only accuracy and blessing, nothing else. As they work for the handicraft market, individuality is not necessary either but a discourse on disappearance of the tradition should be kept nevertheless, attracting the people they interact with attention towards the becoming of the tradition as a whole and the community.

c. **Fixity and innovation**

Similarly, fixity and innovations in the painting tradition depends more on the painter's willingness and necessities than on his actual ability. Each painter to a certain extent proved able to innovate within the boundaries of the tradition with changes in format, materials, technique, and iconography. These innovations should probably not be seen as genius-like epiphanies and surely not independent of any context of production but instead, in terms of adaptability to a particular new context i. e. patron. Taking the example of Vaikuntam and his sons, all three agree to follow the conventions and do not question or alter those. When asked about the colours, none ever mentioned about a particular choice or liking but instead about the conventions to follow as it were in the past.

Yet, traditional artists have their own grounds to innovate and this craftsmanship does not necessarily block innovation. Vinay Nakash regularly participates in workshops where he collaborates with contemporary artists from different regions in India. The 2010 workshop gathered together contemporary artists from all over India, all trained in fine arts with groups of two traditional and folk artists. Vinay had to collaborate with a contemporary artist from Kerala. The output proves particularly different than the usual Cheriyal paintings with large tinted areas and fewer motifs, the inclusion of shade on the figures and landscape elements. Vinay also took the initiative to give the main figure a cell phone in her hand. Finally, he knew how to paint on canvas rather than cotton cloth. Similar workshops take place regularly and Vinay has been chosen in his family

to participate several times. He attended the Goa Regional Painters Camp, a workshop in Panaji, Goa for one week in September 2013 where again, five traditional artists were working in collaboration with fifteen contemporary artists. There, he was much more satisfied because he could paint in his own style, using acrylic, making borders in the Cheriyal style, but adding perspective to the houses.

Vinay shows understanding and adaptability to innovation but not necessarily willingness; so do most of the Cheriyal painters. This should not be considered as incapacity and questions the necessity to assign a status as either artist or craftsmen to a painter with what it connotes. Instead, it is important to see painters as deeply engaged individually into a painting community. This painting community is representative of a tradition which is patron-sensitive hence obviously attached to innovative capacities, and guiding most of the decisions without further questions.

d. **Conclusion**

The very act of naming the painting tradition Cheriyal implies that these paintings are painted by artists who know about the Cheriyal conventions, including its new forms of patronage and possibilities of innovation and transformation. In practice, this is much more complex. Painters may be categorised depending on where they work from, especially in application of the GI tag. They may be categorised depending on their training, whether formal or apprenticeship. They may also be considered in terms of painting skills, those capable of miniatures and those more comfortable in bigger format, those technically skilled in the use of other media and formats. They may be understood through their caste and social divisions as well. Finally, they may be understood with regards to their capacities to either follow the fixity of the tradition or to innovate for further patrons. The interest they have been receiving for the last forty years and the increase of variety in commissions makes them more open to the reality of contemporary arts and crafts.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

1. Summary of the thesis

While studying the development of crafts in India, it is often assumed that craftsmen act as the sole transmitters of their expertise to contemporaries in an invariable way and without disrupting the structure in which the craft has a utility. This implies that a given tradition is limited to only certain changes, so far as they do not hamper the inherited and functional features of the practice. Yet, the study of living traditions often challenges this framed view of tradition. Tradition is also a dynamic space of social and cultural changes that play an equally important role in the construction of a craft's heritage; and which Cheriyal painting proves.

Cheriyal painting was first recognized as a scroll painting tradition, within a well regulated performance practice that involves several communities, all bound together by service and duty, and all apprehending continuity and changes through the legitimizing function of the paintings and their performance. As the revival of Cheriyal painting set aside the performance, one realizes that these scrolls are only a small portion of what Cheriyal paintings currently are. The emphasis on the material culture of this tradition permitted their entry to museums and the handicraft market. Further commercialization as a means to the sustainability of the tradition turned the scroll for performance into art and craft, into smaller paintings for museum and home decoration, into craft commodities, and into a wide range of derivate objects and derivate meanings. What remained essentially were the stylistic features of the painting, the divided composition, the red background, and the bright colours. Finally, private patrons appropriated the Cheriyal idiom to their own cultural capital or politics, maintaining a connection with the 'original' only through its painters.

Because of these changes, it is difficult to assign specific features to the Cheriyal painting tradition. Could we say that this is the same tradition as it were? Should these changes - and innovation more broadly - be inclusive elements of the definition? And who decides the framework and limits of the tradition? These are some of the questions

that one faces with contemporary Cheriyal painting, and which are best answered by the government and the handicraft market.

The cases of the GI tag and the Award competitions are key examples of government's initiatives towards the sustainability of Cheriyal painting. By the time the GI tag was applied to Cheriyal paintings, there were no more painting centres apart from Cheriyal. But the construction of a single provenance for this tradition erased all possibility of other centres that have existed in the past too. Soon enough, Cheriyal painting would only be painting from Cheriyal, discarding the heritage of other communities or locations that participated to the tradition earlier. Similarly with the painters, the master title and new training practices inevitably brought competition for the most 'authentic' Cheriyal artists, hence the disappearance of others.

If the government's intervention changed the modes of recognition of the painting tradition and of its painters, it also had an impact on the materiality and iconography of these paintings. The paintings shrank, shifted the flowing for the faster line, moved the caste Puranas to leave space for pan-Indian Hindu subjects, and confirmed miniature to its authoritative position in the history of Indian art. But if one compares the scrolls for performance with the miniature award or the 'village scenes,' are we looking at the same tradition? It seems ironical that the paintings officially recognized as the best of a craft by the market, only share few elements of what this craft used to be (26 registers of local genealogical Puranas).

The handicraft market works closely with the Government (Development Commissioner) towards the sustainability of the craft. Together, they act as the primary patron of Cheriyal painting; hence as a highly influential entity in the constructed definition of the painting practice. The government led initiatives directed Cheriyal painting towards a better-known Hindu iconography, towards homogenized stylistic features and an authentic origin, best illustrated on the national scale with the new genre it created in Pata paintings. To a certain extent, the material and pictorial features of the paintings do define the tradition but painters and patrons constantly pull this definition towards their necessities. Evidently however, as long as the handicraft market approves of any changes, the painting will remain 'traditional.'

In light of the various pictorial and discursive possibilities for Cheriyal paintings it is difficult to find consistency in the features that may define the tradition and one is puzzled with the choices available to conduct the task. The government and market's words seemed convincing at first: few characteristic features such as the narrative dimension, a divided composition, red and contrasting colour, Hindu and rural subject. But if this has been fabricated for the market and the survival of the tradition, perhaps their authenticity is at doubt. At the same time, the paintings of the Sri Venkateswara College and of Shrinathji for instance opened up the pictorial possibilities of the tradition and offer a convincing answer to sustainability – and survival - as well. Perhaps attempting to define the tradition, its limits and who best answers its sustainability is beside the point. Whatever the answer is, Cheriyal painting tradition, and probably many others too, are malleable cultural entities that 'survive' due to their adaptive nature, and their capacity to carry along their heritage under a few visual consistencies.

2. **Contributions**

This research on Cheriyal painting had three major goals. The first one was to present original and primary material on a painting tradition that was only a little studied (Mittal 2014 and Thangavelu 1998). The second was to rectify earlier focus on the scrolls to consider Cheriyal painting's variety and entirety, therefore giving equal consideration to the scroll for performance and to 'Cheriyal visual culture.' The third was to explore the various lives of Cheriyal paintings and apprehend the matter of change within the painting tradition, which demanded attention to the paintings and their environment of commission, production, and circulation. Across eight chapters, I aimed to present Cheriyal painting as a flexible tradition, taking shape in the process of transmission, and inevitably adapting to both the fixity and dynamism of its environment.

Between Jyotindra Jain's concerns for painting as material culture of particular communities,[1] and Helle Bundgaard's[2] approach to crafts and their institutions, this research on Cheriyal painting contributes to the increasing knowledge about lesser-

[1] Jain, *Painted Myths of Creation: Art and Ritual of an Indian Tribe*.
[2] Bundgaard, *Indian Art Worlds in Contention: Local, Regional and National Discourses On Orissan Patta*.

known painting traditions, from a lesser-known region of India, which is Telangana. It did so in a factual manner, with field material and primary data, but also in a more conceptual framework in proposing a "cultural biography" of the paintings.[3] In that sense, this research was particularly ambitious and resulted in both satisfactions and shortcomings.

On the one side, this research increased awareness about the region's painting developments, and about visual culture in Telangana and more broadly in South India. As we move further away from Telangana, the research contributed to the existing scholarship on folk and tribal art in India, especially on its response to contemporaneity. As the Bengali *pat* expanded on their performative capacities and developed new themes, Cheriyal paintings translated their intimate relation with narrative onto miniature, walls, and digital supports. As Gond painting entered the international art market, Cheriyal painting participated in 'universal' collections of objects. The study of Cheriyal paintings in their contemporary context of change was fundamental in order to draw such parallels and there are many more to explore.

This research also provides information about the painters, performers, patrons, markets and museums of Cheriyal paintings, which is valuable for scholarship on each of these entities independently. The section on temple paintings for instance, although only introductory, offered new material on the local religious practice. Perhaps the most significant example is located in the chapter on museums, which added to the young scholarship on the subject, especially with regards to the triggering emergence of 'edutainment'[4] spaces to which Cheriyal painting had much to offer, and gain.

3. **Limitations**

The interdisciplinary nature of the subject – and object – necessitated a broad range of literature and methods to approach it. The limitations of this dissertation result from the introductory nature of several of the avenues I proposed. The section on museums especially, could be taken further with a deeper inspection of the literature on the

[3] Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biographies of Things."
[4] Starn, *A Historian's Brief Guide to New Museum Studies*. 91.

subject. Similarly, approaching the local communities of Telangana could benefit from a better knowledge of the local caste structure, religious and domestic practices.
The major concern however, is the absence of material on the performance of caste Puranas to corroborate the visual material available. Recordings and transcriptions of the Padmasali Purana and the Katam Raju especially would have enhanced the strength of these two cases presented in Chapter 4. This resulted too, in an insecure attempt at presenting the organic function of the three communities that interact with the scroll in Chapter 3, without going to the full extent of this organicity. As for the scrolls, their mysterious narratives are yet to be decoded, which can only be achieved through the intervention of a Telugu speaker into the subject. The three chapters devoted to Cheriyal painting as scrolls for performance (Chapter 2, 3, and 4), and which in fact formed the most cohesive part of the thesis, turned to be the hardest to construct and the most limiting. There is a lot more work lying ahead to give credibility to the performance of local caste Puranas and their impenetrable narratives.

Another one of this dissertation's limitations is about the performance but this time, within institutions. This thesis critiqued museums and the handicraft markets for their focus on objects that set the performances aside. In this, it missed the importance of scholarship as an institution as well. This research too, focused on the objects, leaving aside the performance, and possibly hastening its ongoing disappearance. This is significant for shaping further enquiry into the performance tradition of caste Puranas in Telangana, not only through its fixity but also through its resilience, as it is the case with the paintings. The questions addressed in this research towards the painting tradition may apply to the performance too. Is the tradition really vanishing? It is benefiting from government's initiatives on intangible heritage? What are the reasons for these institutions (including scholarship) for discarding performance?

As Cheriyal painting was apparently dying, I thought I would document the fall, which in fact, turned into to documenting a boom. Perhaps the fall is not in the painting but in the performance which makes it relevant not only as a reference point for the painting tradition, but also as a continuous and contingent development to that of painting, across handicraft and museum institutions. In this regard, Chandan Bose proposed a step further towards the evolution of the caste Purana performances in Telangana and the

responsiveness of the performance tradition to its changing environment.[5] There is much to take further from this, particularly in observing both contemporary painting and performances together and the contingent role of their respective institutions.

Finally, this research dedicated a large amount of energy towards understanding the construction of a discourse for Cheriyal painting across institutions. In spite of the discursive nature of this part of the research, I tried to include original visual material to illustrate this. This proved limited however, due to the inaccessibility of this material, especially within museums, and also due to the difficulty in incorporating this material into the discourse, especially for the section on handicraft. This reflects the undercurrent tendency to focus on more impressive pieces, therefore devaluating visual culture, which is something I tried hard to avoid but could not as time came to select material to include. There is a lot more to say - and to see - about Cheriyal paintings and objects for the handicraft market, their technique, and the painters' division of painting labour which could enhance the art historical intentions of this study.

4. Scope for further research

Evidently, there are many other examples of painting commissions which I chose not to talk about because of the limitation of this thesis. I would like to propose few avenues that may be taken further as a complement to what I already presented.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this thesis is the case study of the Katam Raju Katha, for which enough was discovered to believe that more may be found. The narrative as translated within the folklore of Telangana took us to Rajasthan and South India. Together with John Smith[6] and Kavita Singh's[7] preliminary research on the Rajasthani *phad*, and with the recently published Ganga duppati from Machilipatnam, [8] this research gathered a set of evidences that connects these two traditions with the performance of caste Puranas in Telangana. This would definitely be a valuable

[5] Bose, "New Images for New Publics: Oral-Visual Narratives of the Telangana."
[6] Smith. *The Epic of Pabuji*.
[7] Singh, "Fixed Image in a Changing World: The Phad paintings of Rajasthan." and Singh, "Transfixed by the arrow of time *Phad* Paintings of Rajasthan."
[8] Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*.

contribution to Indian folklore that may suggest new modes of exchanges across region and history.

The section on museums, and the limited presence of its critique in these conclusive remarks, speaks for its capacity to stand independently in this thesis. I chose to include it as part of the process of institutionalisation of the paintings and tried as much as I could not to diverge. Approaching museums through their discourse on objects was particularly frustrating as the museums themselves offered so much visual and discursive possibilities. The performative visit at the Calico museum was particularly intriguing with regards to the symbolism it provides to the exhibits. The crafts museums too, oscillating between ethnographic concerns and commercial appeal, make a strong case for Indian museology, using rooted objects to politicise the National within the global, which is an area where there is much more to say.

Finally, the major point of expansion for this research is situated in the end of this thesis when I question the limits of Cheriyal paintings. Young Cheriyal painters interact with the contemporary art scene especially within south Indian, across their formal training in art school but also through participation at cooperative workshops in institutions such as the Lalit Kala Akademi. Contemporary artists too, choose to take inspiration from Cheriyal paintings. Laxman Aelay for instance, belongs to the Padmasali community who used to patronise performances. He is a recognised artist of the contemporary Hyderabad scene, and uses in his own paintings, motifs that were painted on the scrolls commissioned by the Kunapuli for his community. This adds to the exceeding capacities of the Cheriyal painting tradition; and possibly confirms the earlier conclusion that the only element that attaches Cheriyal paintings to its definition is the painters.

5. **Cheriyal paintings**

The discourse on craft survival initiated in the Victorian era and the writings of Coomaraswamy, then utilised by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in Independent India, and to a certain extent continued with Jyotindra Jain and the Crafts Museum, found a new dimension within the handicraft and handlooms government bodies of modern India. Emporia and crafts council translate government's policies into commercial tools,

selling Cheriyal paintings as part of the romantic vision of a disappearing craft, and a distorted revivalist idea applied to the consuming mindset of our present time. It is a similar idea of 'survival' that drove me to do a PhD on a disappearing craft.

When I visited Cheriyal for the first time in 2012, I understood that I had fallen into the clever and propagandist discourse of the handicraft market, relegated by the artisans themselves that promotes dying traditions to achieve its survival. In a way, this dissertation is a response to these initial motives and to the assumption that the tradition needs to be salvaged. It did so in exploring the elements that framed the Cheriyal painting tradition and how far could the tradition go before being called something else.

The conclusion is simple yet open. It is not about whether Cheriyal painting has successfully managed to continue as it were, or whether it disappeared. Cheriyal paintings are as numerous as the painters and the patrons are and their visual features alone, cannot speak for its continuity or disappearance. The visual features can only help in drawing connections between various paintings as they answer various demands, therefore creating categories such as 'Cheriyal paintings' that in fact, reflect the institutional framework in which they evolve; that of the local communities, the handicraft sector, or the museums.

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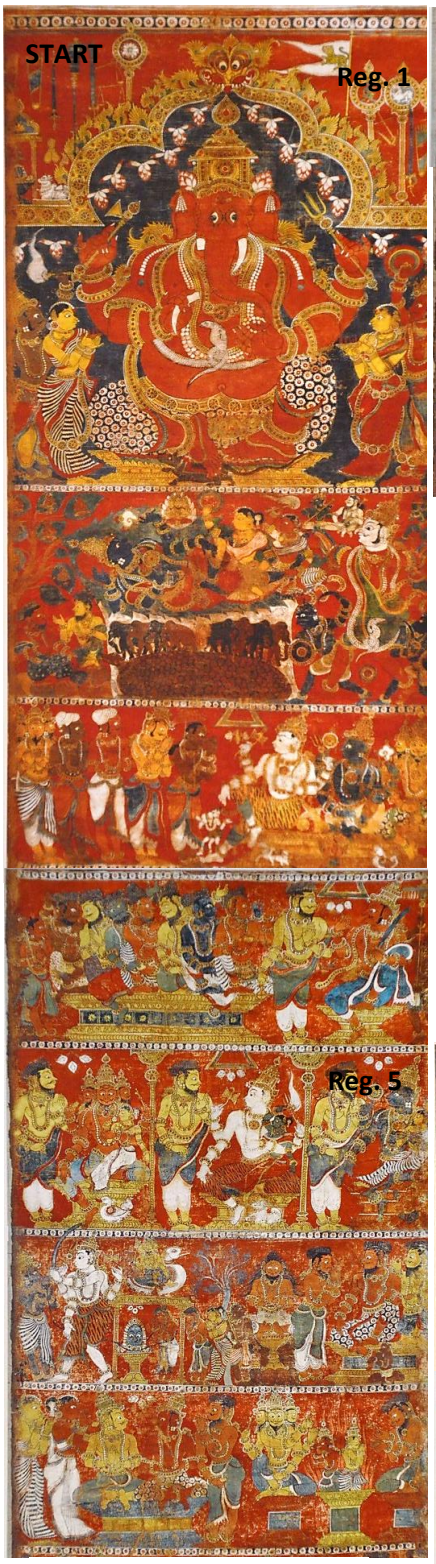
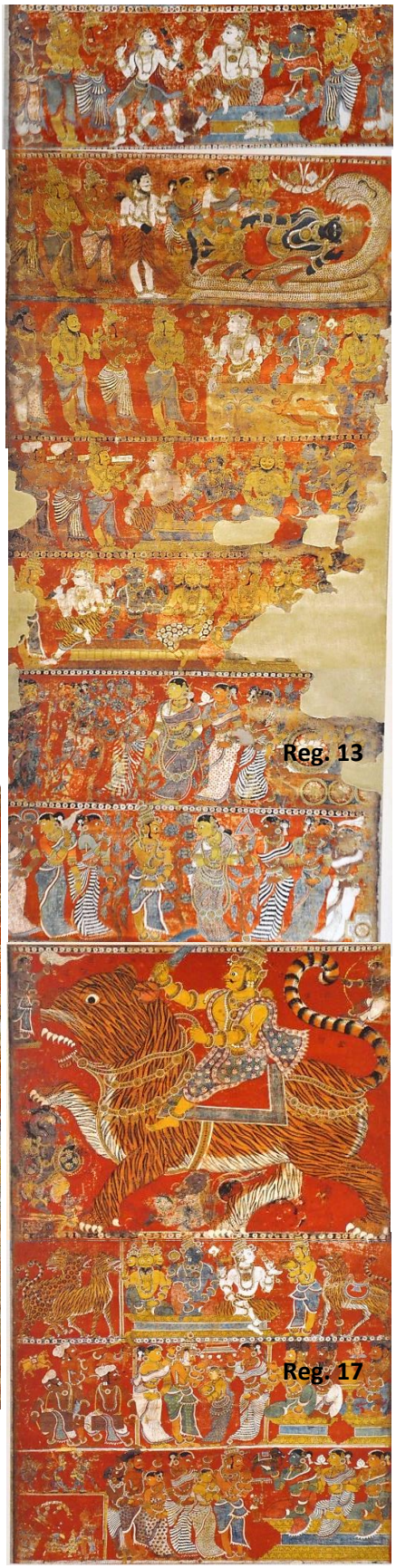
Figures

II- Historical and artistic context

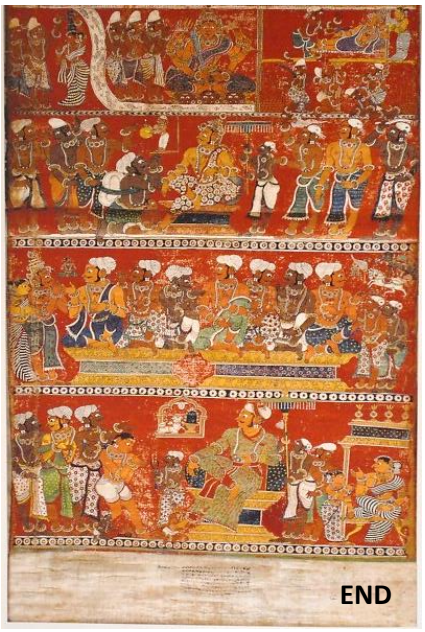
Fig. 2. 1: Map of India, in red, Cheriyal, Telangana (www.googlemaps.com)



Markandeya Purana



Bhavana Rishi



Padmasali Purana

Fig. 2. 2: Scroll of the Markandeya Purana, c. 1625, 846 x 91 cm, Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art. (Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

Fig. 2. 3 top: Detail of the ceiling painting of the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi, women attending Parvati before her wedding (photograph of the author)

Fig. 2. 4 bottom: Detail of registers 13 and 14 of the 1625 scroll, Badravati in the forest with her maid and her meeting with Bhavana.

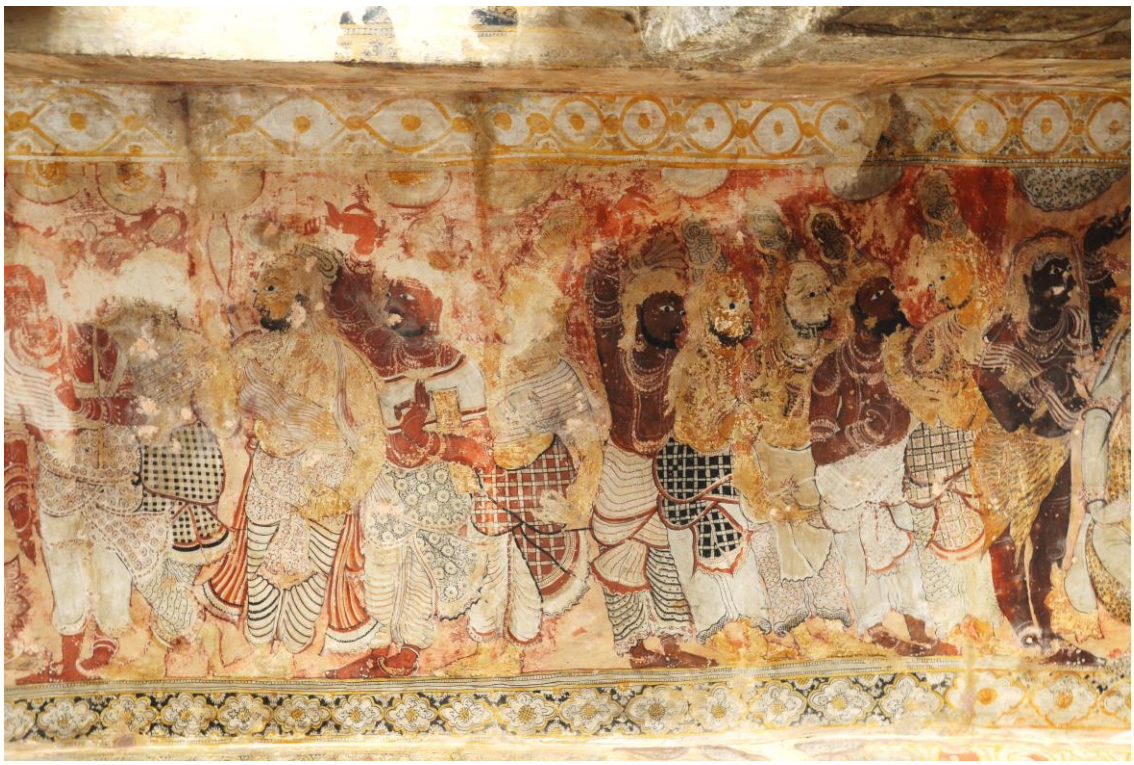


Fig. 2. 5 top: Men in procession for the wedding of Shiva and Parvati (Lepakshi) (photograph of the author).

Fig. 2. 6 bottom: Detail of the registers 21 and 22 of the 1625 scroll, noblemen and king at the court.

Fig. 2. 7 top: Scene where the boar attacks the sages (Lepakshi) (photograph of the author).

Fig.: 2. 8 bottom: Detail of register 15 of the 1625 scroll, Bhavana Rishi mounting the tiger.

Fig. 2. 9:
Scroll of the Markandeya Purana,
c. 1750, 1056 x 86 cm,
Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art.
(Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

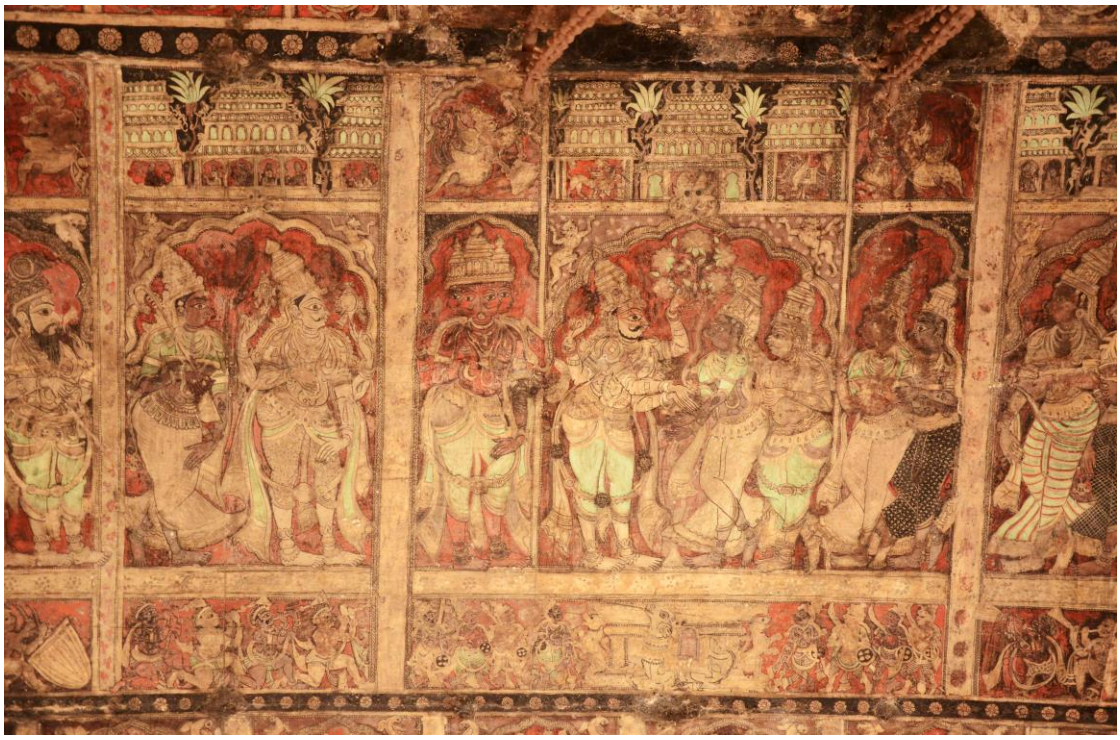


Fig. 2. 10 top: Shiva and Girija's wedding, Virupaksha Temple Hampi (photograph of the author)

Fig. 2. 11 bottom: Detail of the register 6 and 7 of the c. 1800 scroll, Bhrigu asking the gods for of a son.

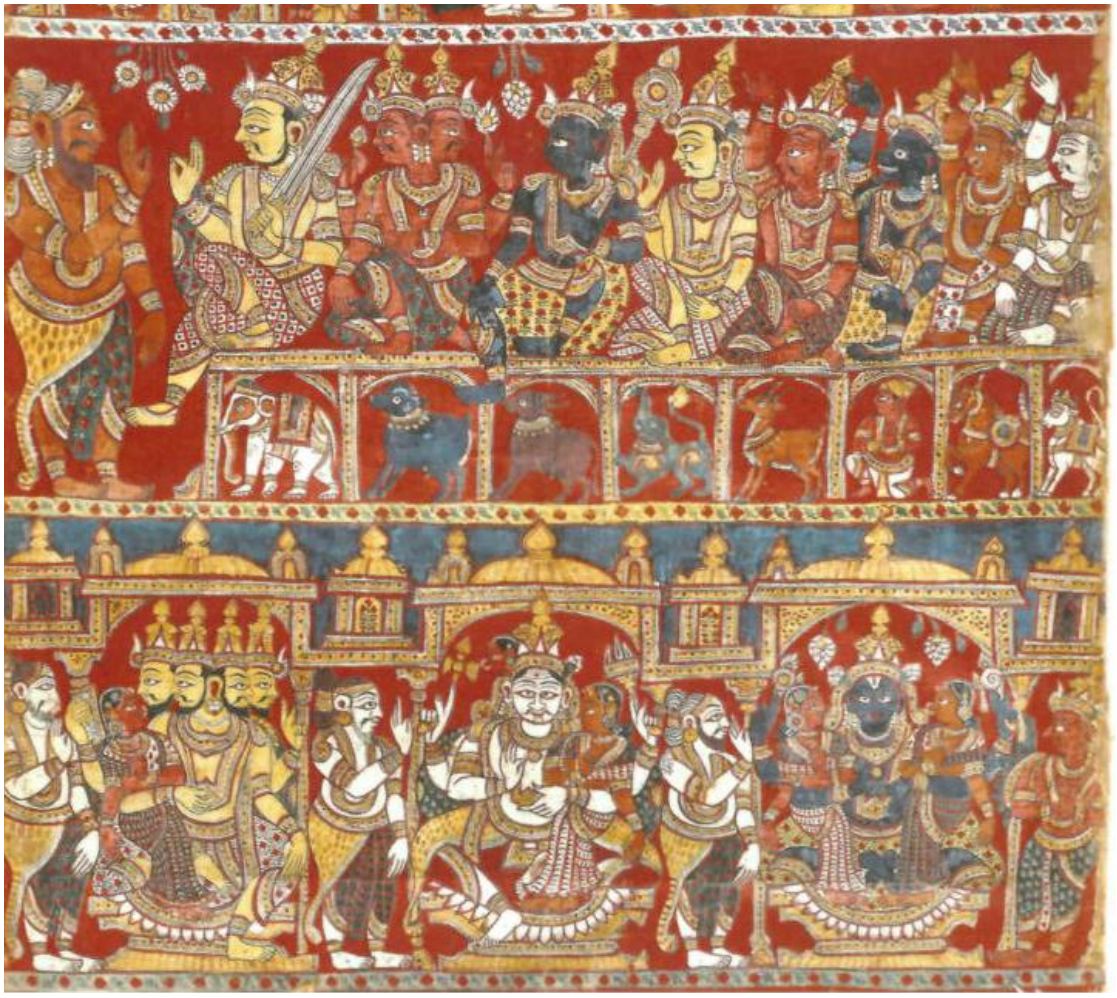


Fig. 2. 12: Full view of the ceiling paintings (Hampi) (iiacd.org)

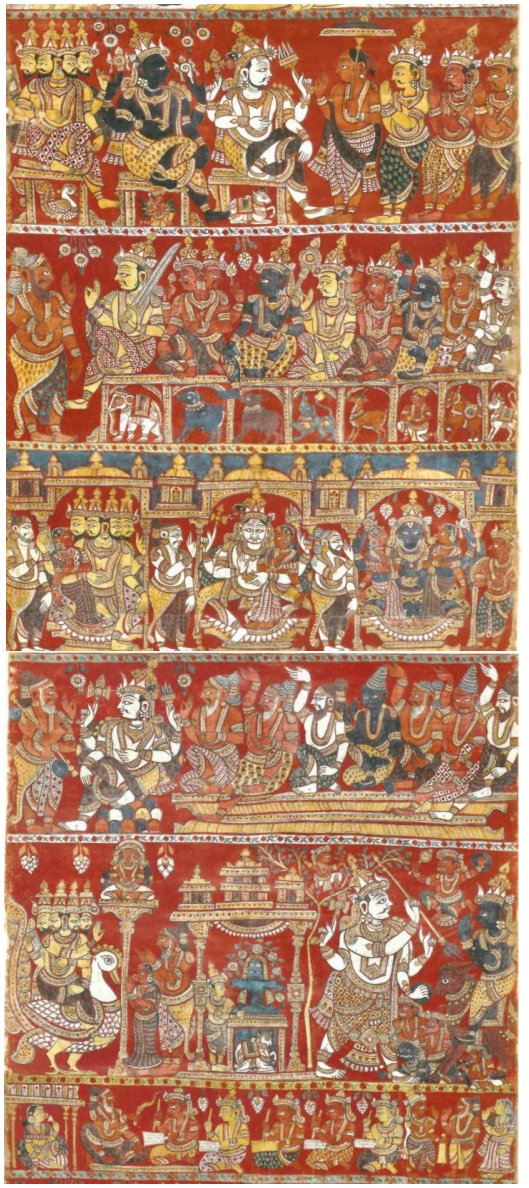


Fig. 2. 13:
Details of registers 5-10,
c. 1750 scroll,
From Bhrigu speaking to the gods until Yama coming to take Markendeya away.

Fig. 2. 14: Ganga *dupatti*, 1881/82, 294 x 419 cm, by Panchakalla Pedda Subbarayudu, Machilipatnam, (Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*).

Fig. 2. 15 top: Detail of a scroll of the Madel Purana, Virabhadra cutting Daksha's head , c. 1840-50, Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art. (Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*).

Fig. 2. 16 bottom: Paithan Painting, Collection of the Crafts Museum, New Delhi, 19th c. (Jain ed. *Picture showmen: insights into the narrative tradition in Indian Art*).

Fig. 2. 17 top left: Detail of a scroll of the Madel Purana, Virabhadra, photograhed by Kirtana Thangavelu in 1993 (Dallapiccola ed. *Indian Paintings, the lesser-known traditions*).

Fig. 2. 18 top right: Shadow Puppet from Andhra Pradesh

Fig. 2. 19 bottom: Tipurantaka (Hampi) (iiacd.org)

Fig. 2. 20: Detail of a Pabuji ki Phad, scroll from Rajasthan, 19th century. Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal (IGRMS) (photograph of the author).

Fig. 2. 21: *Kavad*, Portable shrine from Rajasthan, 20th c. Bhartiya Lok Kala Museum Udaipur (photographs of the author

Fig. 2. 22: Portion of a doll set of the Katam Raju Katha as performed in Telangana by the Mandaheccu for the Gollas, c. 2000, DakshinaChitra (photograph of the author).

Fig. 2. 23: Portable shrine from Telangana, 19th c. Telugu University Museum Warangal, (photograph of the author).

III- Paintings in Cheriyal

Fig. 3. 1: 2016 District map of Telangana (www.wikipedia.com)

Fig. 3. 2: Detail of the last register of the Madel Purana, c. 1800-1810, 963 x 81 cm, Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art. (Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*). On the bottom right, a man carrying two scrolls hanged from a stick.

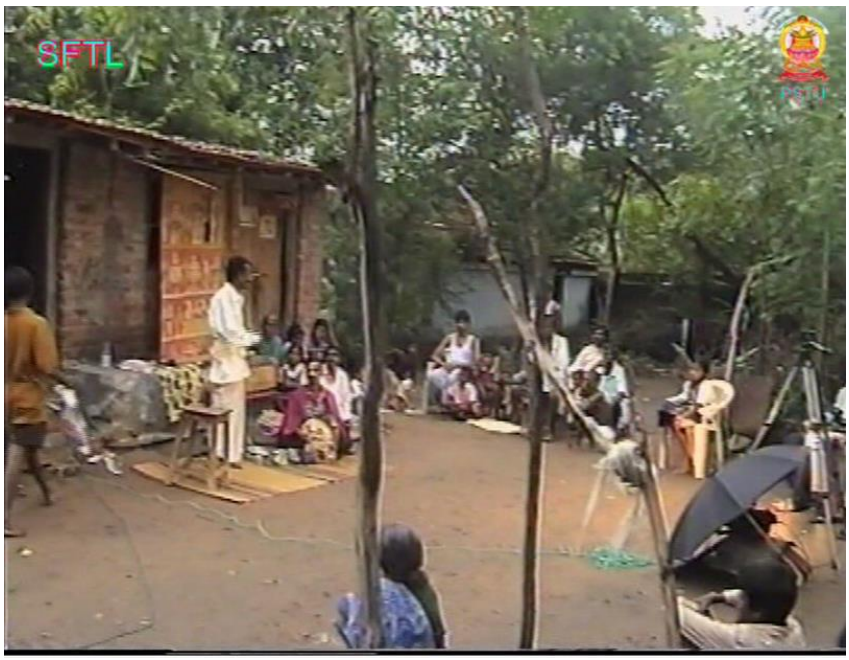


Fig. 3. 3: Screenshop of a video recording of a performance of the Markandeya Purana by the Kunapuli for the Padmasali (weavers) c. 2010 FOSSILS, Telugu University Warangal 2010)

Fig. 3. 4: Display of the Madel Purana, episode of the tale of Virabhadra, photograhed by Kirtana Thangavelu in 1993 (Dallapiccola ed. *Indian Paintings, the lesser-known traditions* 2011)

Fig. 3. 5: Detail of the last 3 registers of the 1625 scroll of the Markandeya Purana, (Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

The variety of costume design and patterns.
The patrons in front of the king.

Fig. 3. 6:
Detail of the register 24 of the Goud Purana,
c. 1900,
1061 x 114 cm,
Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art.
(Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

The toddy trees.

Fig. 3. 7:
Detail of the last 3 registers of the Madel Purana,
c. 1800-1810,
963 x 81 cm,
Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art.
(Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

The balls of washed cloths.

Fig. 3. 8:
Digitally printed flex scroll of the Jambavanta Purana.
Nashkal village, Telangana.
Photographed by Chandan Bose in 2013.
(Bose. Web blog post. *Material Religions* 2015).

Fig. 3. 9 top: Performance of the Mudiraj Katha for the Mutrasi and Mudiraj by the Kakipadigela. The performers wear simple clothes, no ornaments and no make-up. Screenshop of a video recording by the Telugu University Warangal, c. 2000. (FOSSILS, Telugu University Warangal 2010.)

Fig. 3. 10 bottom: Performance of the Jambavanta Puranam for the Madiga by the Dakkali. The performers wear elaborate costumes, jewellery, make up and use props. They perform in front of a printed flex copy of a scroll. Photographed by Chandan Bose in 2013. (Bose. Web blog post. *Material Religions* 2015)

Temple 1

Fig. 3. 11 and 3. 12: Gadi Mysamma temple (top) to goddess Maysamma (bottom), worshipped by the whole village, Cheriyal (photographs of the author, March 2014)

Fig. 3. 13 and 3. 14: Paintings on the walls of the Gadi Mysamma temple. Procession of devotees carrying offerings to the goddess such as a sacrificed goat, and a *bonalu* (rice pot); male playing drums. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Temple 2

Fig. 3. 15 and 3. 16: Yellamma temple (top) to goddess Yellamma (bottom), worshipped by the Goud, Cheriyal. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

On the temple wall, on the top left, the toddy tappers making the toddy drink, on the top right, Kamadhenu the sacred cow, at the bottom, procession of devotees to the temple.

Temple 3

Fig. 3. 17 and 3. 18: Peddamma temple (top) to goddess Pedamma riding her tiger (bottom), woshipped by the Mudiraj and Kakipadigela, Cheriyal. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Fig. 3. 19: Peddamma Temple Paintings on the North wall of the temple. Procession of devotees. (photograph of the author, March 2014).

Temple 4

Fig. 3. 20 and 3. 21: Mahankali temple (top) to goddess Mahankali (bottom), worshipped by the whole village. (photographs of the author, March 2014)

Temple 4 bis

Fig. 3. 22: In the same compoundas temple 4, Poshamma temple to Poshamma, worshipped by the Madiga, Cheriyal.

Temple 5

Fig. 3. 23: Poshamma temple to Goddess Poshamma, worshipped by the whole village, outskirts of Cheriyal. (photograph of the author, March 2014).

Fig. 3. 24, and 3. 25: Painting on the temple walls, procession of devotees to the temple. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Temple 6

Fir. 3. 26 and 3. 27: Yellamma/Renuka temple to Goddess Yellamma/Renuka, woshipped by the Goud, outskirts of Cheriyal. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Fig. 3. 28: Paintings of the toddy tappers' activities on the North wall of the temple. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Temple 7

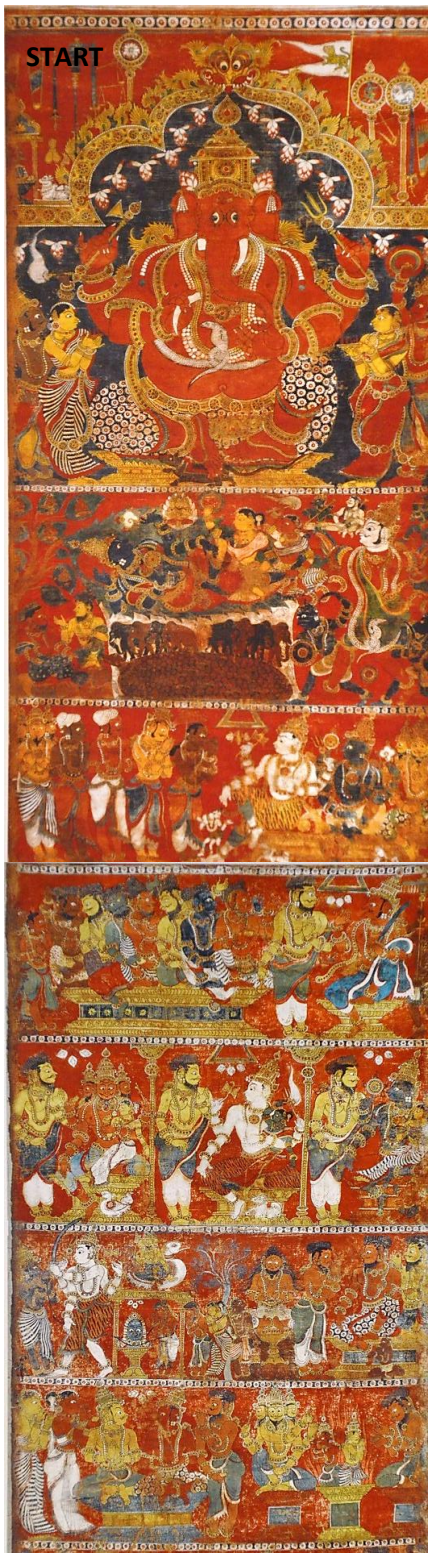
Fi. 3. 29 and 3. 30: Yellamma temple (top) to Goddess Yellamma (bottom), woshipped by the Goud, outskirts of Cheriyal. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

Fig. 3. 31 and 3. 32: Paintings of the toddy tappers' activities on the wall of the shed adjacent to the temple (See figure 3.29 for full view of the temple complex, on the right

Temple 8

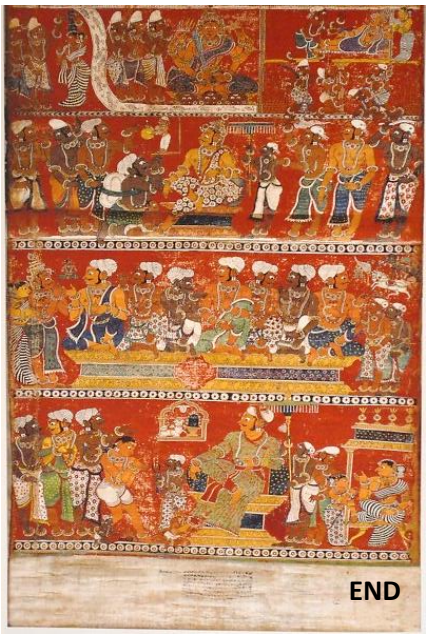
Fig. 3. 33 and 3. 34: Mallanna / Mallikarjuna Swamy temple (top), to Mallana (bottom on the poster), worshipped by everyone but popular among OBC (Kuruma, Mudiraj, Yadava), Komuravelli, Warangal. (photographs of the author, March 2014).

IV- Degree of change in the painting tradition



Markandeya Purana

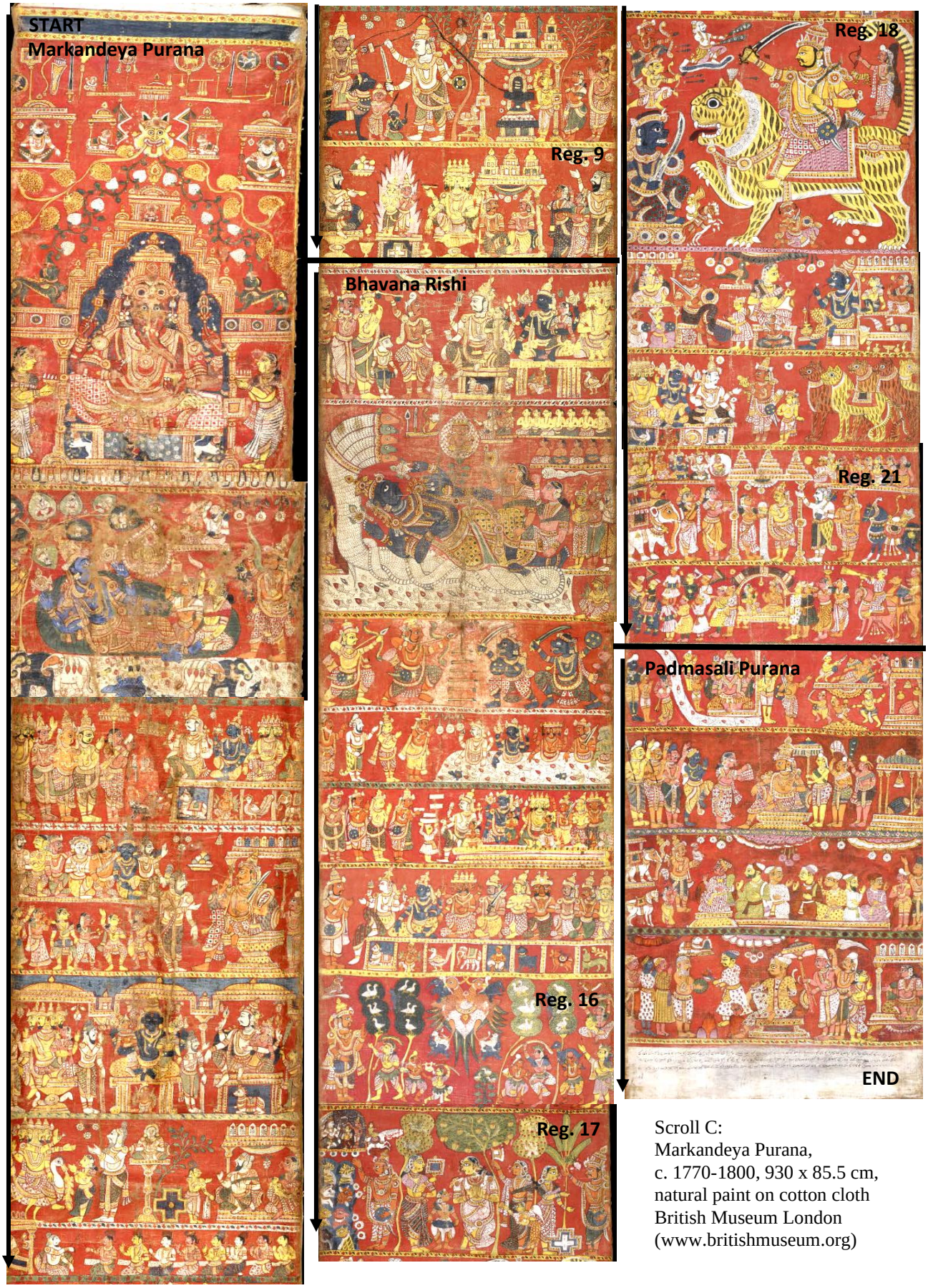
Bhavana Rishi



Padmasali Purana

Scroll A:
Scroll of the Markandeya Purana,
c. 1625, 846 x 91 cm,
Jagdish and Kamla Mittal
Museum of Indian Art.
(Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

Scroll B:
Scroll of the Markandeya Purana,
c. 1750-80, 1056 x 86 cm,
Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art.
(Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

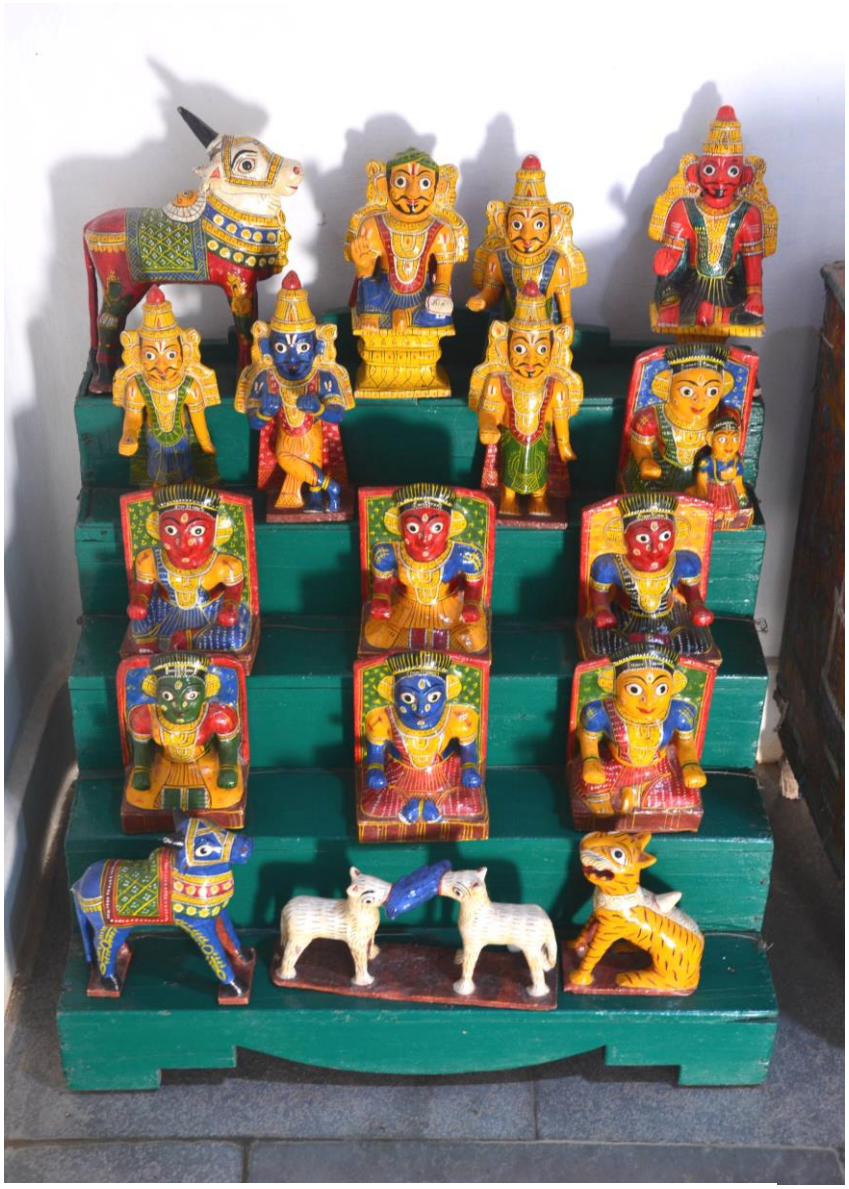


Scroll C:
Markandeya Purana,
c. 1770-1800, 930 x 85.5 cm,
natural paint on cotton cloth
British Museum London
(www.britishmuseum.org)

Scroll D: Markandeya Purana, c. 1780-1820, 1096 x 90 cm, natural paint on cotton cloth, Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art (Mittal, *Deccani Scroll Paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art*)

Scroll E: Section of the Markendeya Purana, c. 18th c,
unknown dimension, natural paint on cotton cloth, Salar Jung Museum Hyderabad
(photograph of the author)

Scroll F:
Markandeya Purana,
c. 2000, 91.5 x 915 cm,
watercolour on canvas,
Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav
Sangrahalaya, Bhopal
(photograph of the author)



G: Set of dolls of the Katam Raju Katha as narrated by the Kunapuli, c. 2000, h. 20 to 30 cm each, wood painted and varnished, DakshinaChitra Chennai. The seven figures with a square background are the seven goddesses / sisters. The crowned figurines are Kings. The horsemen are the three most important Rajus. At the bottom, Ganesha in Red.

Gangamma, tutelary deity of the Kunapuli, part of the set of dolls G., c. 2000, H48 x L28 x D16 cm, wood painted and varnished, DakshinaChitra Chennai, (photographs of the author).

Scroll H:
Vertical scroll of the Katam Raju Katha,
2003,
123 x 379 cm,
watercolour on canvas,
Telugu University Museum Warangal (photograph of the author)

Scroll I: Horizontal scroll of the Katam Raju Katha, 2013, around 300 x 700 cm, watercolour on canvas, currently in circulation with the performers (http://vaikuntamnakash.blogspot.co.uk/)

Scroll I: Horizontal scroll of the Katam Raju Katha, 2013, around 300 x 700 cm, watercolour on canvas, currently in circulation with the performers (http://vaikuntamnakash.blogspot.co.uk/)

J: Ganga *dupatti*, 1881/82, 294 x 419 cm, by Panchakalla Pedda Subbarayudu, Machilipatnam, Dallapiccola, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings*).

V- Cheriyal paintings as craft

Fig. 5. 1: 'Village scene' Small painting on cloth for the Lepakshi Emporium, 35 x 15 cm, painted by Sai Kiran in 2014 (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 2: Small masks for the Lepakshi Emporium, 15 x 15 cm (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 3: Cheriyal painting at Shilparamam Hyderabad 2012 (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 4: ‘Miniature’ Award by Vaikuntam Nakash, 1994, 55 x 38 cm, watercolour on paper, Shiva Purana (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 5: ‘Miniature’ Award by Nageshwar Nakash, 2004, 140 x 110 cm, watercolour on cloth, Krishna Lila (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 6: ‘Miniature’ Award by Madhu Merugoju, 2007, 38 x 43 cm, watercolour on paper Krishna Lila (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 7: Workshop organised by NGO ALEAP in July 2014 (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 8: ALEAP workshop, making the sketches, July 2014 (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 9: Bengali *pat* painting for the handicraft market (photokahini.com).

Fig. 5. 10: Orissan *pattachitra* for the handicraft market (kalarte.com).

Fig. 5. 11: Cheriyal *patam* for the handicraft market (photograph of the author).

Fig. 5. 12: 'Story painting' of the Ramayana by Madhu Merugoju, c. 2000, 45 x 60 cm, Watercolour on cloth, Ram Katha Museum, Ayodhya (photograph of the author)

VI- Cheriyal painting and museums

Fig. 6. 1: Tribal and folk habitat IGRMS, Bhopal, 2014 (photograph of the author)

Fig. 6. 2: Gallery no. 10 “Visual storage,” IGRMS, Bhopal, 2014 (photograph of the author)

Fig. 6. 3: Gallery no. 10 “Visual storage,” IGRMS, Bhopal, 2014 (photograph of the author)

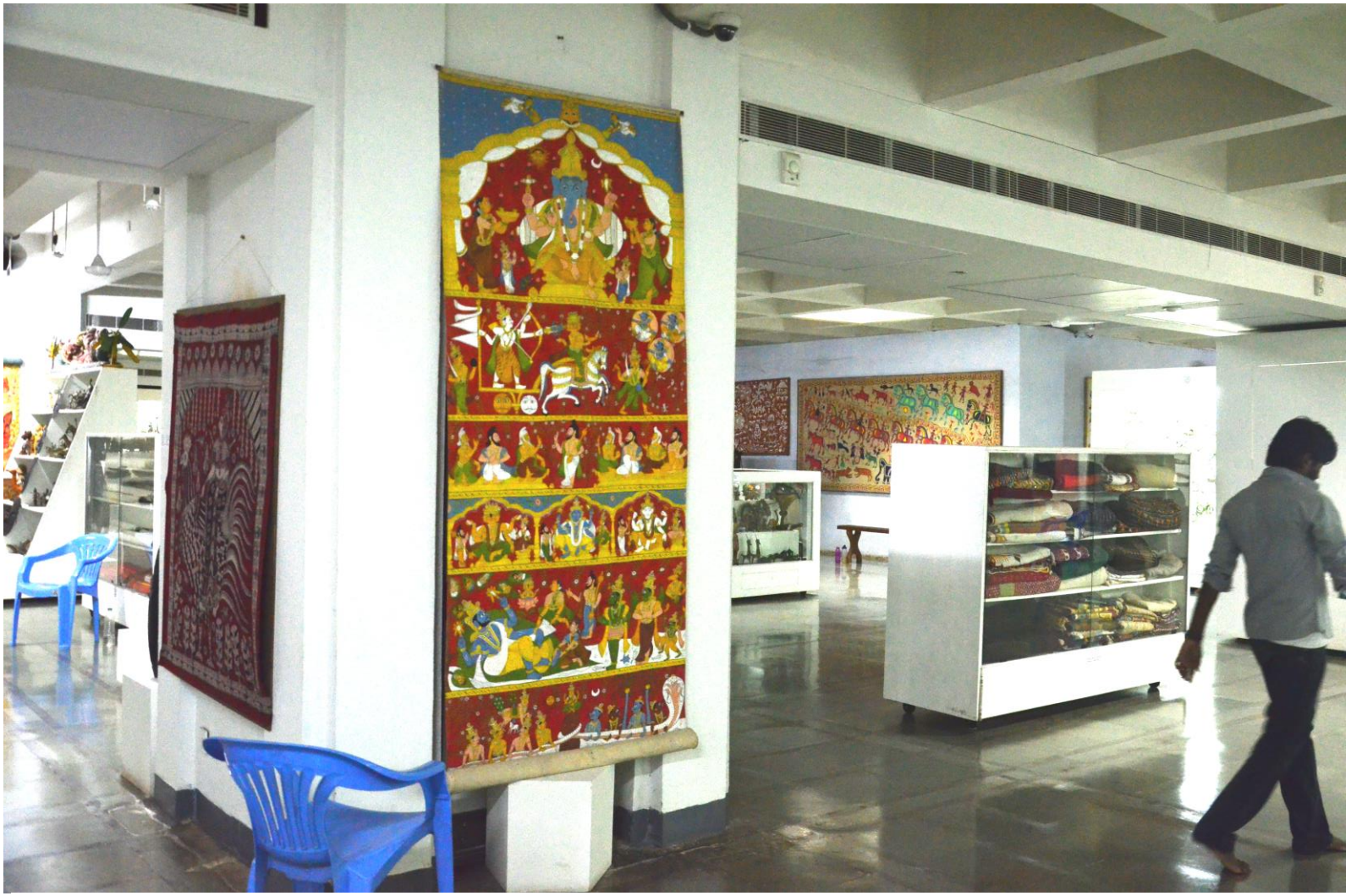


Fig. 6. 4: Scroll of the Markendeya Purana on display in Gallery no. 10, IGRMS, Bhopal, 2014 (photograph of the author)

Fig. 6. 5: Craft Store, DakshinaChitra, Chennai 2014 (photograph of the author)

Fig. 6. 6: Andhra Pradesh house, DakshinaChitra, Chennai, 2014 (photograph of the author)

Fig. 6. 7: Cheriyal painting display in the Andhra Pradesh house, DakshinaChitra, Chennai, 2014 (photograph of the author)

VII- Questioning the limits of Cheriyal painting

Fig. 7. 1: Cheriyal painting at the entrance of the Sri Venkateswara College New Delhi 2014 (photograph of the author)

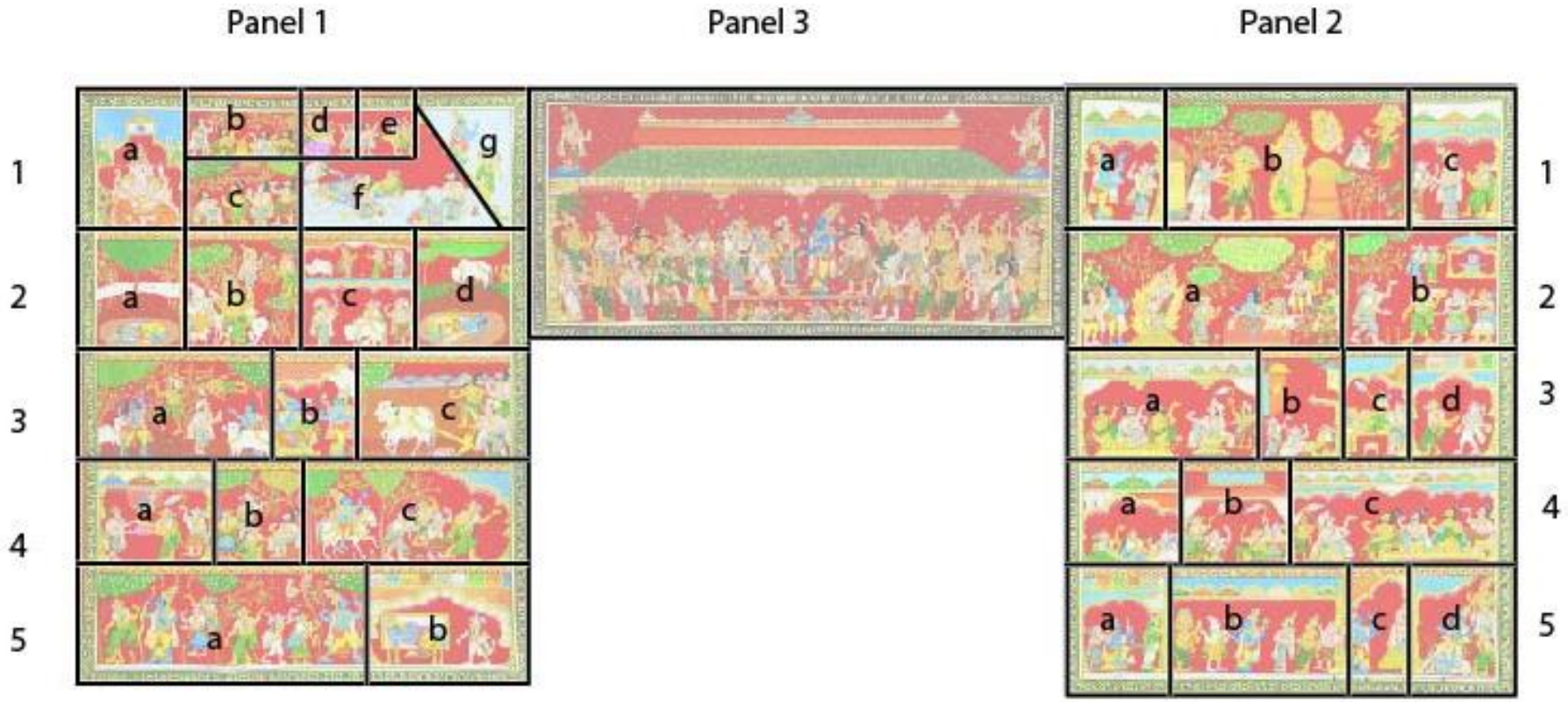


Fig. 7. 2: Diagram for the Sri Venkateswara College painting with numbered registers and lettered scenes

Fig. 7. 3: Panel no. 1 Left, Beginning of the story, Ganesha, the sage Bhrigu meeting the Trinity and Srinivasa falling in love with Padmavathi (Madhu Merugoju)

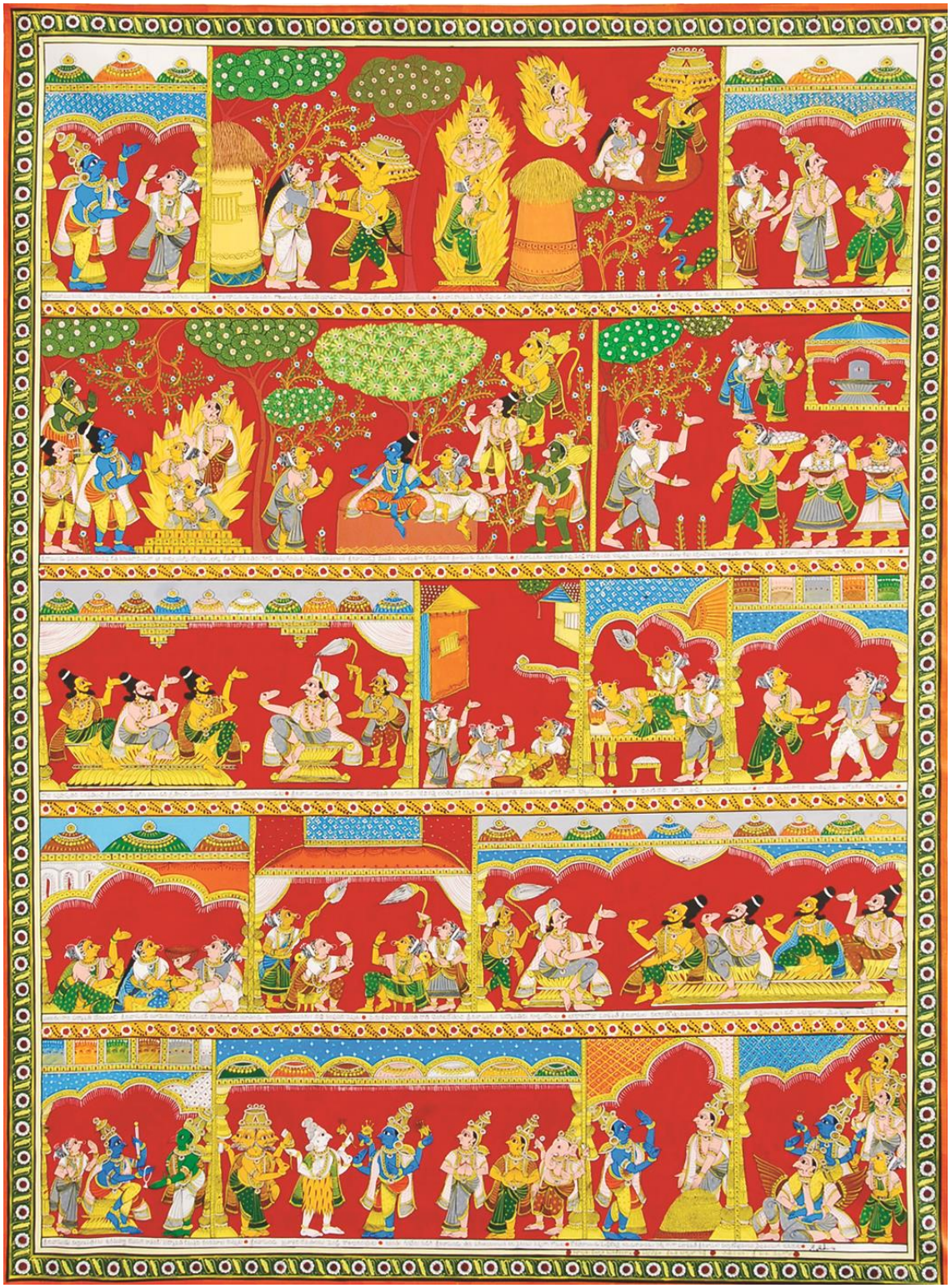


Fig. 7. 4: Panel no. 2 Right, Origin of Padmavathi and finalising the marriage (Madhu Merugoju)

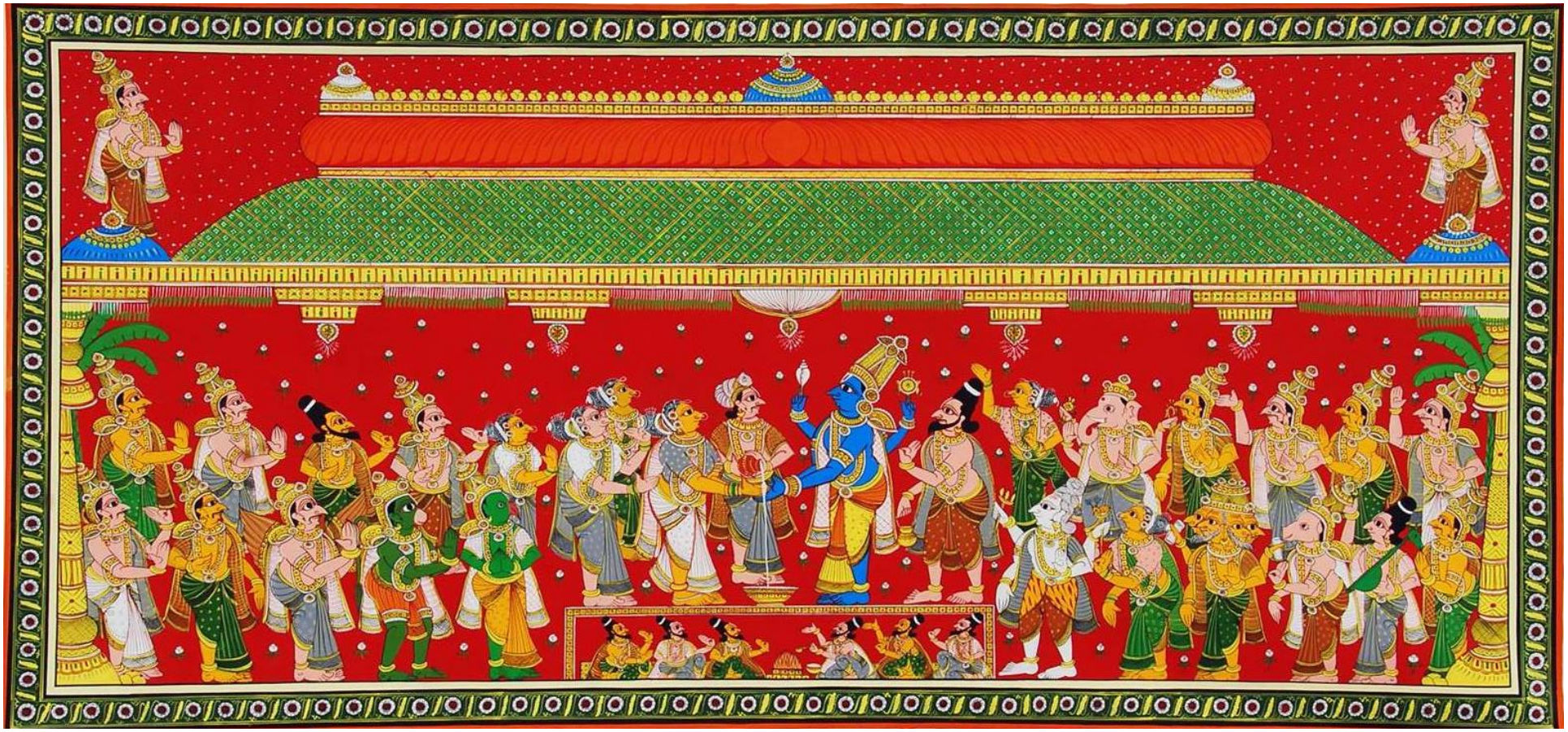


Fig. 7. 5: Panel no 3 Central, Marriage of Srinivasa and Padmavathi (Madhu Merugoju)

Fig. 7. 6: Detail of the registers 10 and 11 of the Markendeya Purana scroll, c. 2000, Indira Gandhi Manav Rashtriya Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, On the top register, farm scene with an attempt at perspective, , (photograph of the author)

Fig.7. 7: 'village scene' on sale at the Lepakshi Emporium in Begumpet, Hyderabad, 2014 (photograph of the author)

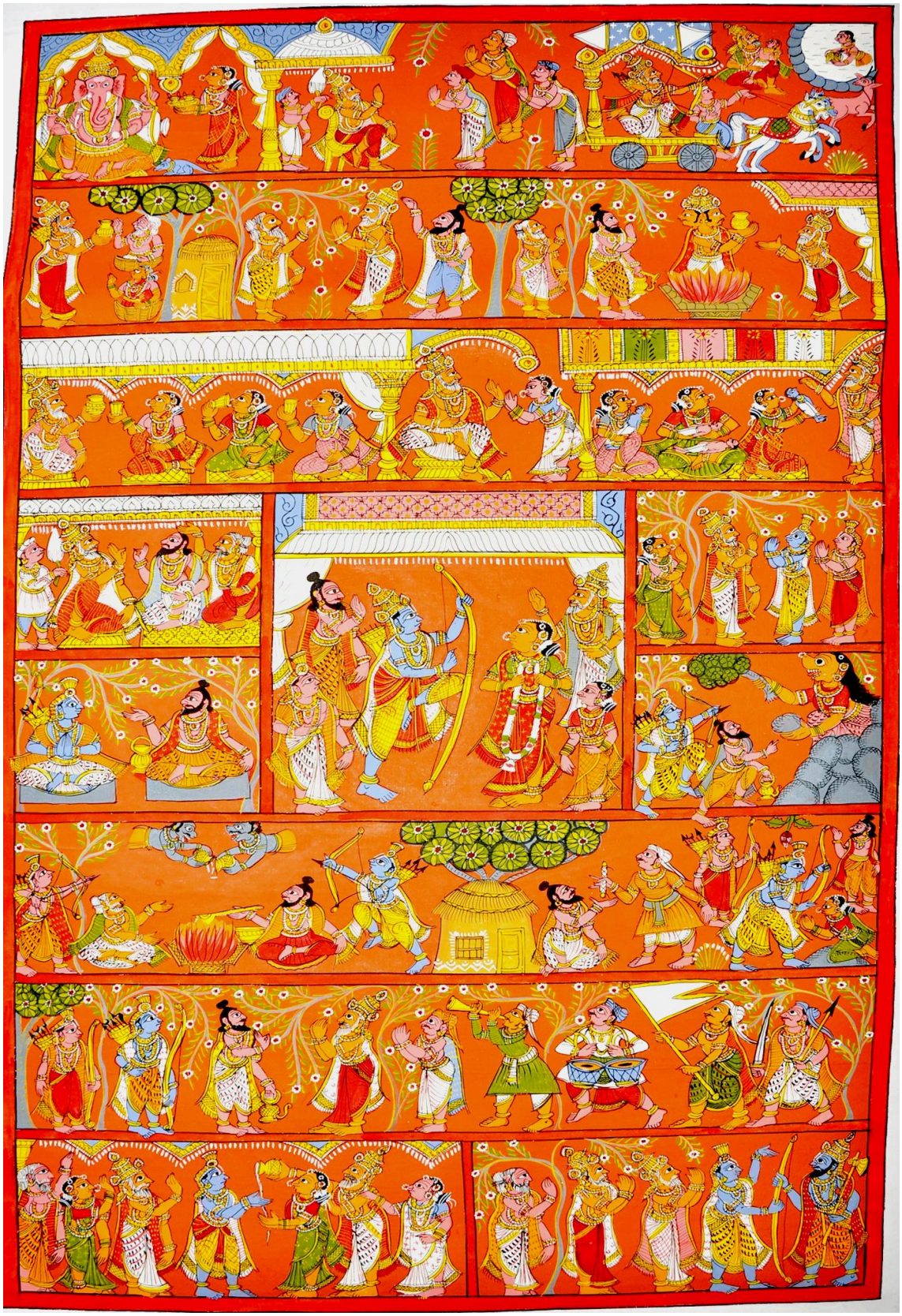


Fig. 7. 8: Panel 1 of the Ramayana, painted by Vaikuntam Nakash for the Ram Katha Museum in Ayodhya, 2013, each panel is the same size 101 x 76 cm

Fig. 7. 9: Panel 2 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 10: Panel 3 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 11: Panel 4 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 12: Panel 5 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 13: Panel 6 Ramayana

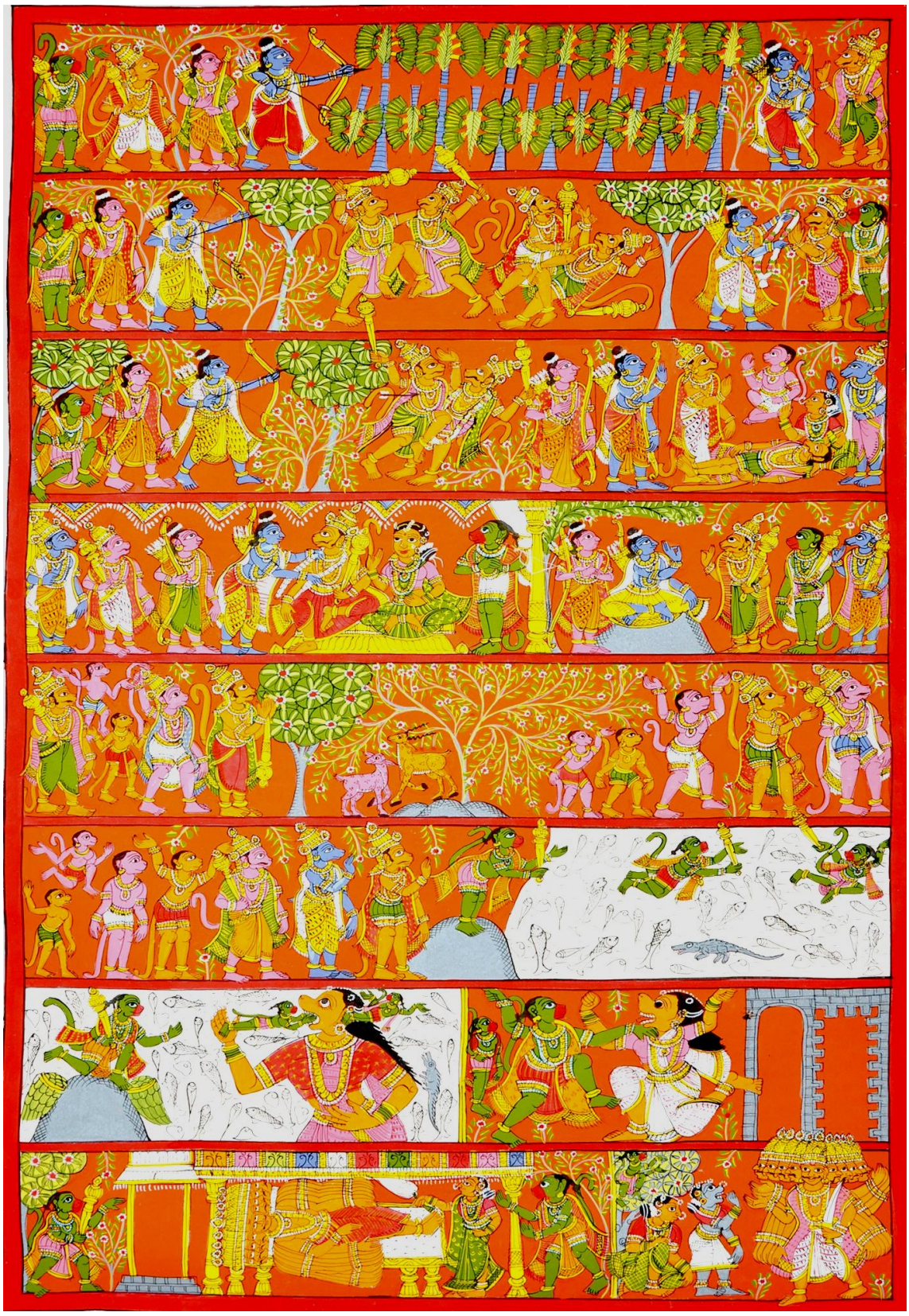


Fig. 7. 14: Panel 7 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 15: Panel 8 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 16: Panel 9 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 17: Panel 10 Ramayana

Fig. 7. 21: Detail of the Markandeya scroll by Vaikuntam, 2000s, IGRMS, Bhopal (photograph of the author).

Fig. 7. 22 Screenshot from 'The Legend of Ponnivala,' Detail of furniture, especially the throne (www.ponnival.com).

Fig. 7. 23: Screenshot from 'The Legend of Ponnivala,' Detail of architectural element (www.ponnival.com).

Fig. 7. 24: Screenshot from 'The Legend of Ponnivala,' Natural element and landscape (www.thelegendofponnivala).

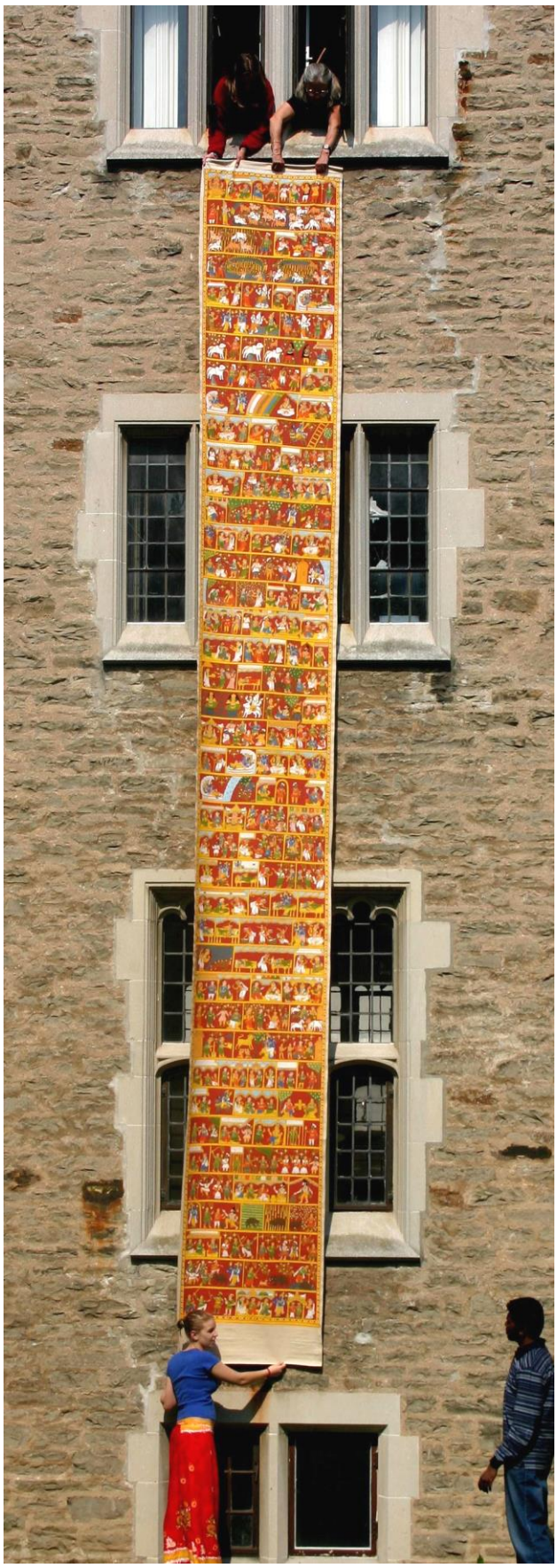


Fig. 7. 25: Scroll of The Legend of Ponnivala, Nageshwar Nakash, 2010, L730 cm, watercolour on cloth (Photograph of Brenda Beck)

Fig.7. 26: Shrinathji, Sai Kiran Nakash, 2014, 105 x 75 cm, Private Collection (photograph of the author)

Fig. 7. 27: Picchavai for the festival of Sharad Purnima, c. 1880, Nathadwara, Rajasthan, watercolour on cotton, H: 182.9 cm W: 121.9 cm, Lent by Ashok and Kay Talwar, (Williams, Joanna et al. *Kingdom of the Sun: Indian Court and Village Art From the Princely State of Mewar*).